

Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature

Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature

VOLUME 1

А-С



Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature

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Introduction

How to Use This Book

The Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature is a resource for students who seek information beyond the simple biographical details of an author's life or a brief overview of the author's major works. This book is designed to offer a comprehensive view of how an author's work fits within the context of the author's life, historical events, and the literary world. This allows for a greater understanding of both the author's work and the cultural and historical environment in which it was created.

The Gale Contextual Encyclopedia of World Literature is divided into entries, each focused on a particular writer who has made significant contributions to world literature. In some cases, these individuals may be known primarily for contributions outside the realm of literature. Karl Marx and Mohandas Gandhi, for example, are two figures famous for their political activism; in another realm, Jean Cocteau and Pier Paolo Pasolini are two writers better known in modern times for their ground-breaking work in film. However, all of these figures have, aside from their other accomplishments, created significant works of literature that have stood the test of time and affected readers beyond the borders of their own cultures.

This book is best used not just to locate the facts of a writer's life and work, but as a way to understand the social, literary, and historical environment in which the writer lived and created. By understanding the context of the writer's work, you are more likely to recognize key themes and stylistic traits as elements of larger trends in the literary world, as well as understand the impact of historical events from a new and unique perspective.

Sections Found within Each Entry in This Book

Each entry in this book is divided into three main parts: Works in Biographical and Historical Context; Works in Literary Context; and Works in Critical Context. These sections are discussed below.

In addition, each entry includes: a Key Facts section, containing birth/death date information as well as a list of major works; a Responses to Literature section, containing discussion and writing activities related to the author in question; a Further Reading

section that includes bibliographic citations as well as reputable sources of additional material about the author in the form of books, periodicals, or Web sites; a Literary and Historical Contemporaries sidebar, listing several famous contemporaries of the author; and a Common Human Experience sidebar, offering examples of other literary or artistic works that share themes or techniques with those by the subject of the entry.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context In this section, you will find information about how events and concerns in the author's life helped to shape the author's work. For example, Russian author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's experiences in a Soviet labor camp led him to write *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973), while his experiences battling cancer inspired his novel Cancer Ward (1968). This section also includes information on historical events or trends that had an effect on the author. For example, the scientific and technological advancements of the nineteenth century greatly influenced the subject matter of the works of Jules Verne, which primarily focused on "fanciful" scientific achievements such as a journey to the moon.

Works in Literary Context In this section, you will find information about how the author's work fits within the context of the body of literature as a whole. This may include a description of a stylistic trait exhibited in the author's writing; for example, the literary technique known as "stream of consciousness" is a defining characteristic of much of the fiction of Virginia Woolf, and information on the technique—as well as examples of how the author used it—can be found in her entry. This section may also include a discussion of the writer's work as it exists within a specific genre, such as Gothic fiction or Surrealist poetry. Finally, the Works in Literary Context section may contain information of specific themes commonly found in the author's work. The writings of Aimé Césaire, for example, frequently address the theme of race relations in colonial regions.

Works in Critical Context In this section, you will find a survey of critical and popular opinion related to the author and the author's most important works. The emphasis is on contemporary opinions, or those formed by readers and critics at the time the author's work was first published. In some cases, critical or popular opinion from the time of publication may not be available; this may be due to the passage of time, as with some ancient Greek and Roman authors, or due to the writer's lack of fame during his or her own lifetime. This section also includes information on how critical or popular opinion on an author has changed over time. Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, for example, have been taken to task by some modern critics for their depictions of race in their most highly regarded works. Some authors popular during their own time, such as Samuel Richardson, have fallen from favor among modern readers, while others virtually unknown during their lifetimes have become part of the classic literary canon.

Other Information Contained in This Book

In addition to the entries for individual authors, this book also contains a chronology that indicates some major historical events related to the development of world literature. At the end of the book, you will find a glossary of terms—primarily literary and historical in nature—that are used in various entries throughout the book, along with a brief explanation of each term.

Advisory Board

Robert Todd Felton

is a freelance writer and educational consultant. He holds a BA in English from Cornell University and an MA from Syracuse University. He taught high school English for nine years.

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He holds a BA from Swarthmore College and an MA from New York University.

Chronology

This chronology contains a brief overview of some of the major events in the history of world literature. This includes the development of technologies and tools that advanced the writing and publishing process, as well as some significant historical events that had an impact on the development of literature.

2100 все-499 се

c. 2100 BCE

The earliest existing fragments of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, widely recognized as the first epic documented in written form, are recorded on clay tablets by ancient Sumerians.

c. 1600 BCE

The first known example of a literary story documented on papyrus, a durable paper-like material made from the fibrous stem of the papyrus plant, is written by ancient Egyptians.

c. 1050 BCE

The Phoenician alphabet, the first widely used alphabetic writing system in the world, is developed from older scripts that included Egyptian hieroglyphics.

c. 850 BCE

Homer, credited as the author of the first ancient Greek epics in written form, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is believed to have lived.

472 BCE

Aeschylus's play *The Persians*, the oldest surviving example of an ancient Greek tragedy, was first performed.

425 BCE

The Acharnians, a play by Aristophanes and the oldest surviving example of ancient Greek comedy, is first performed.

c. 190 BCE

The production of parchment, a writing surface derived from animal skin, is refined into an easily produced method in the ancient Greek city of Pergamum, effectively ending the dominance of papyrus.

c. 300 CE

Kâlidâsa, Indian playwright and one of the foremost literary figures of the Sanskrit language, is believed to have lived.

397 CE Augustine of Hippo, a North African bishop, begins publication of his *Confessions*, generally regarded as the first autobiography and the first example of confessional literature.

500-1499

- c. 794 The first paper mill begins operation in Baghdad, in modern-day Iraq. Over the course of several centuries, wood pulp-based paper replaces parchment as the dominant writing surface throughout the world.
- 868 The *Diamond Sutra* is published in China; printed using woodblock printing methods, this publication is the oldest known printed book in existence.
- 1021 The Tale of Genji, a Japanese work attributed to Murasaki Shikibu, is published. The work becomes a landmark in Japanese literature

- and is often cited as one of the earliest books to resemble the modern novel.
- 1048 Omar Khayyam, a Persian mathematician and poet, is born. His poetic works are later collected—along with some works of suspect attribution—in *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, a key work of Persian literature.
- c. 1220 Snorri Sturluson creates the first comprehensive written collection of Norse mythology with the completion of the *Prose Edda*.
- 1265 Italian poet Dante Alighieri, creator of the epic known as *The Divine Comedy*, is born.
- 1439 German metalworker Johann Gutenberg creates the first functional printing press, resulting in the ability to mass-produce copies of literature easily and cheaply instead of by hand.

1500-1799

- 1558 Queen Elizabeth I assumes the throne of England, marking the beginning of the Elizabethan Age, a period of forty-five years during which significant advancements in English poetry and drama occurred.
- 1564 William Shakespeare, generally acknowledged by modern readers as the greatest dramatist in the history of the English language, is born.
- 1605 The first volume of *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes is published. Written in Spanish, *Don Quixote* is widely considered to be the first modern novel.
- 1649 The Puritan-led British Commonwealth Parliament, in control after the overthrow of the British monarchy, bans theatrical productions throughout England due to the purported indecency of dramatic works. The ban would last until 1680, and would be followed by an explosion of theatrical development during the period known as the Restoration.
- 1719 The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe is published; this book is often regarded as the first true novel of the English language.
- 1798 Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems, a poetic collection by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is pub-

lished, marking for many the beginning of the Romantic movement in English literature.

1800-Today

- 1856 Gustave Flaubert's novel Madame Bovary is published in serial form, leading to an obscenity trial over its contents. Madame Bovary is considered by many to be the key work that launched the Realism movement in literature.
- 1857 Novelist Charles Dickens founds All the Year Round, one of many inexpensive British serial magazines that make literature available to virtually all levels of social class; All the Year Round subsequently features the first publication of the Dickens novels Great Expectations and A Tale of Two Cities.
- 1873 Production begins on the first commercially successful typewriter by E. Remington and Sons, which will allow writers to produce work substantially more quickly and more neatly than writing by hand.
- 1922 James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" are both published, defining for many the Modernist literary movement.
- 1924 André Breton publishes his *Surrealist Manifesto*, launching an avant-garde literary and artistic movement characterized by a celebration of the irrational.
- 1932 Joseph Stalin, dictatorial leader of the Soviet Union, decrees that socialist realism—an artistic style in which the working class and government leaders are praised—is the only government-approved art style. Writers and artists who create controversial works are censored and placed into labor camps; a secret distribution system known as samizdat is created to preserve and share censored works among dissenting intellectuals.
- 1950 Eugène Ionesco's play *The Bald Soprano* debuts in Paris, launching the theatrical movement known as Theater of the Absurd.
- 1992 The World Wide Web, an interlinking structure designed by Sir Tim Berners-Lee for viewing cross-referenced multimedia documents from any location through data transfer, is officially released.



Marginal Kobo Abe

BORN: 1924, Tokyo DIED: 1993, Tokyo NATIONALITY: Japanese

GENRE: Fiction, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Woman in the Dunes (1962) The Face of Another (1964) The Ruined Map (1973) The Ark Sakura (1984)

Overview

An important figure in contemporary Japanese literature, Kobo Abe attracted an international audience for novels exploring the alienation and loss of identity experienced by many in Japanese society after World War II. Abe's novels, plays, and screenplays drew from developments in Western avant-garde literature rather than from Japanese sources. His work was successful abroad and often translated into English and other languages. His fiction is rich in allegory and metaphysical implications, employing an intriguing combination of detailed realism and bizarre, nightmarish fantasy. He was also a noted theater director and photographer.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Childhood in Manchuria

Kimifusa Abe was born in Tokyo, Japan, on March 7, 1924. When he was an infant, his father took the family to Manchuria, in northern China, where he served as a doctor in the city of Mukden. Japan captured Manchuria in 1931, going on to attack mainland China in 1937. Growing up in a foreign country occupied by Japanese forces gave Abe a certain ambivalence about his Japanese identity. Displaced from his home country, disgusted by

militant nationalism and by the conduct of the occupying army, he changed his name from Kimifusa to Kobo, a more Chinese-sounding rendering. He had already discovered the sense of alienation that would pervade his creative work.

Postwar Japan As a young man, Abe attended a private high school in Tokyo. He was a voracious reader, preferring works by philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Jaspers and literature by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Edgar Allan Poe, and Franz Kafka. In 1943, at the height of World War II and following his parents' insistence, Abe entered the medical school at Tokyo University. Yet he took no pleasure in preparing for a medical career; the stress was so intense that at one point he checked himself into a mental hospital. Abe began to experiment in writing poetry and fiction as the war was ending. His first novel, The Road Sign at the End of the Road, was published in 1948, the same year he earned his MD degree. Encouraged by his literary success, he never practiced medicine. Some critics believe Abe's scientific studies may have developed his abilities to describe situations, and even emotions, with detached precision.

In the troubled years following Japan's military defeat in World War II, Abe joined a group of avant-garde writers and intellectuals attempting to reassert humanistic values through art. Under the influence of Hanada Kiyoteru, Abe became interested in European surrealism and Marxism and how to combine them. He soon became known for his fiction. He won prizes for his short story "Red Cocoon" (1950) and his novel *The Crime of Mr. S. Karuma* (1951). The latter work typifies Abe's thematic obsessions; its narrator loses the ability to communicate with other people. His popularity grew quickly.

Abe was the first major Japanese writer to present avant-garde narratives of urban alienation, in keeping with Japan's rapid postwar urbanization. Some traditional Japanese artists remained committed to a more pastoral vision of the nation, which had largely disappeared by the early 1950s, when the American occupation ended. The



Kobo Abe Abe, Kobo, photograph.

gerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by atomic weapons also hovered over postwar Japanese culture. Apocalyptic fears drive the absurdist plot of *Inter Ice Age Four* (1959), a science fiction novel set in a futuristic Japan threatened by melting polar ice caps.

Lost Identities Abe garnered international acclaim for The Woman in the Dunes (1962). Both as a novel and as a 1965 film by the celebrated director Hiroshi Teshigahara, a hit at the Cannes Film Festival, this work remains one of the most widely appreciated pieces from postwar Japan. The Kafkaesque novel relates the nightmarish experiences of a teacher and amateur entomologist, Niki Jumpei, who is enslaved by a group of people living beneath a huge sand dune, including one fascinating widow who is determined to keep him with her. At first, Jumpei seeks to regain his freedom, but he gradually finds meaning in his new circumstances and rejects an opportunity to escape. The shifting sands that constantly endanger this community constitute a metaphor expressing Abe's sense of the puzzle of human existence.

The Woman in the Dunes fully explores a central theme of Abe's fiction: the obliteration of identity. The theme recurs in his next three novels. The Face of Another (1964) uses motifs from detective fiction to tell the story of a man who wears a mask to cover disfiguring scars. In

his new guise, the protagonist, who seems to lose his identity, manages to seduce his own wife. *The Ruined Map* (1967) carries the detective genre to an outrageous conclusion: the hunter and the hunted merge as a detective who gradually assumes the identity of the man he has been hired to locate. Teshigahara directed films of both stories from screen adaptations by Abe.

Like Woman in the Dunes, The Box Man (1973) advances a narrative through a striking metaphor. The narrator of this work casts off his ordinary, middle-class existence to live in a cardboard box, which he equips with enough items to sustain his daily life. Free from the constraints of society, the narrator invents his own idyllic life

Visual Theater Kobo Abe was also a notable playwright. His early stage works showed the influence of Marxism and existentialism. His most successful work for the theater, Friends (1967), critiques Japanese communal values, which Abe sees as stifling individual creativity. The "family" that invades the apartment of the hapless protagonist manages to take over and eradicate him over the course of the play. In 1973 Abe began his own theater group, the Kobo Abe Studio, which produced many of his best-known dramas. His wife, artist Machi Abe, prepared many of the stage designs for these plays. Many of these productions emphasized movement rather than dialogue, as Abe attempted to create a theatrical style to express surrealistic images visually.

Abe's novel Secret Rendezvous (1977) emphasizes setting—a cavernous hospital—rather than character. Searching for his wife at the facility, a shoe salesman discovers that the hospital is run by an assortment of psychopaths, sexual deviants, and grotesque beasts. The novel presents the reader with a puzzle, but no solution. Abe took seven years to write The Ark Sakura (1984), a farcical version of the story of Noah's ark. Mole, the protagonist, has decided to load a few people into an ark, for protection from an impending nuclear holocaust. His vision of a postapocalyptic society inside the ark is thwarted by three confidence men he has enlisted as crew members and by the invasion of street gangs and cantankerous elderly people. Abe's dark humor conveys troubling ideas about nuclear war, old age, and those on the margins of society. Abe died of heart failure on January 22, 1993, in a Tokyo hospital.

Works in Literary Context

Because of his alienation from Japanese culture, Kobo Abe remained aloof from classical Japanese literature. His work is far removed from the aesthetic vision and strategies of older Japanese writers such as Kawabata Yasunari, or of traditional cultural forms such as Noh theater. Instead, his literary influences are primarily Western. Among them are Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Poe, and Lewis Carroll. Abe recalls reciting the stories of Poe, one of his earliest inspirations, to his high school classmates in

Manchuria. When he ran out of Poe stories, he began making up his own.

Objective Style The objectivity of Abe's style resembles that of other writers who were also trained in medicine, such as Russian playwright Anton Chekhov or the Japanese Meiji writer Mori Ogai. Although their works read quite differently and are composed with vastly different aims, these writers resemble each other in the cool dissection of their perspectives. William Currie, in Approaches to the Modern Japanese Novel, finds Abe's stress on concrete and specific details to be a culturally Japanese trait.

Urban Loneliness Despite the obvious differences of tone and design among Abe's novels—from science fiction to detective stories to biblical allegory—they all display his consistent thematic concerns of alienation and loss of identity. In addition, they all betray the author's concern with the impersonal, isolating features of the urban landscape. In a 1973 interview, Abe claimed that loneliness, although a universal phenomenon, "is a new theme for the Japanese. The reason is that the concept of loneliness appeared in the urban mode of life." Abe perceived, and loathed, the growth of futuristic megacities; his Japan is an urban, not a rural, nation, and his cities are futuristic, claustrophobic, and labyrinthine.

Ambassador to the Absurd During his lifetime, Abe was the foremost Japanese exponent of avant-garde, absurdist literature. With the development of another generation of Japanese writers such as Haruki Murakami, whose vision of contemporary life bears similarities to Abe's view of the human condition, Abe's work may foretell a broad new Japanese sensibility.

Works in Critical Context

Kobo Abe achieved critical and popular success fairly early in his career; *Woman in the Dunes*, the novel and film, brought him to worldwide attention. Several of his novels were translated into English in the 1960s. Although some of his books earned better reviews than others, Abe remained perhaps the most "translatable" Japanese writer of his generation.

Japanese and Overseas Reception Abe's critical reception, both in Japan and abroad, has sometimes been ambiguous. For some Japanese readers, Abe sheds too much of the Japanese literary tradition and no longer seems to mirror their perceptions of their culture. Abe himself, who proclaimed his lack of strong ties to his home country, seemed to support this notion. His work shares this unattached vision with that of many other postwar writers around the world, such as Samuel Beckett and Alain Robbe-Grillet. Abe expresses a strong conviction that the parochial is irrelevant as modern culture develops. The universality of his concerns, and the absence of notably Japanese cultural markers in his writing, may be the key to his international reputation, in the opinion of critics such as Hisaaki Yamanouchi, author of

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Abe's famous contemporaries include:

Akira Kurosawa (1910–1998): Japanese filmmaker; his films *The Seven Samurai* and *Rashomon* are among the most famous works of world cinema.

Tadeusz Rozewicz (1921–): Polish poet and dramatist whose works defy literary conventions.

Truman Capote (1924–1984): American author of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *In Cold Blood*.

Yukio Mishima (1925–1970): Japanese author and playwright who committed ritual suicide in a political

Harold Pinter (1930–): British playwright whose works were produced by Kobo Abe Studio; Pinter won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005.

Kenzaburo Oe (1935–): Japanese novelist influenced by existentialism and concerned with social justice; Oe won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1994.

The Search for Authenticity in Modern Japanese Literature. On the other hand, some Western critics, seeking some special Japanese quality in works they read in translation, come away disappointed with reading Abe's work.

The Woman in the Dunes When The Woman in the Dunes was first published in English, it was recognized as unique if not entirely successful. Stanley Kauffmann, writing for the New York Review of Books, stated that because of the book's structure, "Unless the author is able to keep us concentrated on the present moment with interest of character and richness of texture, we become impatient. This is too often true of Abe's book." Writing for Saturday Review, Earl Miner agreed that the book requires a delicate balance to work, but noted that "the tone and meaning are well sustained." Armando Martins Janiera, in his Japanese and Western Literature, called it "a novel of exceptional force."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Explore Abe's vision of the city; how does he use urban settings to reinforce a message or convey a mood?
- 2. Several of Abe's works center on a startling image, such as the cardboard box that becomes the home of the Box Man. Write an extended analysis of a single image from one of Abe's prose works and its meaning.
- 3. Some critics contend that Abe's writing is intentionally universal, rather than embedded in a specific

COMMON HUMAN **EXPERIENCE**

The Woman in the Dunes, The Box Man, and other works by Kobo Abe exemplify the mind-bending possibilities of the absurdist genre, a mixture of satire, shock, and surrealism. Here are some other great works of literary absurdity:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), a children's book by Lewis Carroll. Alice falls down the rabbit hole into hilarious adventures that make this an enduring landmark of nonsense literature: "Curiouser and curiouser!"

"The Metamorphosis" (1912), a short story by Franz Kafka. The classic work of absurdist fiction that begins: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin "

Catch-22 (1961), a novel by Joseph Heller. This black comedy, ranked as one of the most important novels of the twentieth century, provides a blistering satire of the insanity of military and bureaucratic logic.

Bus Stop (1983), a play by Gao Xingjian. A group of people waits for a bus—for years—in this absurdist play by the first Chinese writer to win the Nobel Prize.

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1998), a novel by Haruki Murakami. The protagonist of this novel loses his cat, his job, and his wife; to find them, he must delve into the modern soul of Japan and the legacy of its conquest of Manchuria. Written by the leading Japanese novelist of the generation after Abe.

culture. What do you think is notably Japanese about his work?

4. Alienation is a major theme in Abe's work and a major theme of twentieth-century literature in general. Use Abe's writing as a source for constructing a detailed interpretation of what "alienation" means.

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Chinua Achebe

BORN: 1930, Ogidi, Nigeria NATIONALITY: Nigerian, African

GENRE: Novels, poetry, essays

MAJOR WORKS:

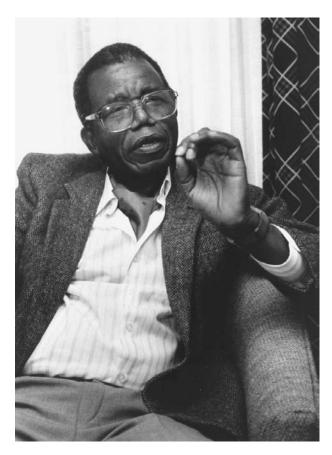
Things Fall Apart (1958) No Longer at Ease (1960) Arrow of God (1964) A Man of the People (1966) Anthills of the Savannah (1987)

Overview

Chinua Achebe, whose work has been published in some fifty languages, is among the founders of contemporary Nigerian literature. Achebe, an ethnic Igbo, writes in English, but alters it to reflect native Nigerian languages. He does this to develop an appreciation for African culture in those unfamiliar with it. Although he has also written poetry, short stories, and essays—both literary and political—Achebe is best known for his novels, in which he offers a close and balanced examination of contemporary Africa and the historical forces that have shaped it.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life in a Colony Pushing for Its Independence Albert Chinualumogu Achebe was born on November 16, 1930, in the village of Ogidi in eastern Nigeria to Janet Iloegbunam Achebe and Isaiah Okafor Achebe. At the time, Nigeria was a British colony, and Western educational and economic models dominated. Achebe's father taught religion for the Church Missionary Society. Chinua Achebe was eight when he began to learn English and fourteen when he went to the Government College at Umuahia in



Chinua Achebe Achebe, Chinua, 1988, photograph. AP Images.

southeastern Nigeria, considered one of the best schools in West Africa. He enrolled in 1948 at University College, Ibadan, Nigeria, intending to study medicine, but soon switched to English literary studies. Achebe rejected the British name "Albert" and took his indigenous name "Chinua" in 1948, a time of growing Nigerian nationalism and increased pressure on Great Britain to grant the colony independence. He contributed stories, essays, and sketches to the *University Herald*, which were later published in *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972).

After graduating, Achebe taught for a year and then began a twelve-year career as a producer for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. In 1957, he went to London to attend the British Broadcasting Corporation Staff School. One of his teachers there was the British novelist and literary critic Gilbert Phelps, who recommended *Things Fall Apart* for publication.

Achebe was appointed director of the Voice of Nigeria (external broadcasting) by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in 1961. That same year, on September 10, he married Christie Chinwe Okoli. They would have four children.

Nigerian Literary Renaissance Things Fall Apart (1958) is an account of colonial history from the point of

view of the colonized rather than the colonizer: The perspective is African instead of Eurocentric, something highly unusual in English-language literature. The novel explores the philosophical principles of an African community, which is self-governing at the outset of the story.

The novel was published early in the Nigerian literary renaissance, two years before Nigeria gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960. The timing of the novel's release helped ensure its success: While Nigerians looked forward with excitement and optimism to the political freedom they would attain after more than a half century of British colonial rule, Achebe understood the need to show his countrymen the strength of their own cultures to assist in the task of nation building, a strength greatly diminished by the imposition of an alien culture.

Achebe's second novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), is set in modern Nigeria in the days immediately before independence from British colonial rule. It reveals the changes to Nigerian society that result from foreign intervention—the extent to which things have fallen apart. The main character's experiences testify to the oppressive weight of doubt, guilt, and regret that the colonial experience has created.

Achebe returns to the past in *Arrow of God* (1964). He evokes a world rich in the complexities of daily domestic, social, political, and religious living further complicated by the now-institutionalized religious and political rules that the colonial force had introduced into Igbo society. The novel is a meditation on the nature and uses of power, and on the responsibility of the person who wields it.

Although the consequences of the loss of predictable political power at the village level can bring personal tragedy, at the national level the consequences are more widespread and longer lasting. It is to this latter reality that Achebe turns in his fourth novel, *A Man of the People* (1966), which is set in the postcolonial period in an independent African country. The governance of the country is, nominally, in the hands of the people, and it is the quality of the leadership and the response of the people to that leadership that concern Achebe.

Nigerian Civil War and Politics Publication of A Man of the People coincided almost exactly with the first military coup d'etat in Nigeria, sparked by ethnic tensions between differing populations in the southern and northern parts of Nigeria. The worsening political situation led to the persecution of the Igbo people, which resulted in a series of massacres. Achebe resigned from his job with the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation after these acts of violence and returned to his homeland.

The Eastern Region declared itself an independent state, called Biafra, in 1967, shortly after a thirty-month civil war began. Throughout the war Achebe traveled widely on Biafran affairs to Europe and North America. There was neither time nor inclination to write long fiction during this period. Rather, Achebe produced most of the poems in the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Achebe's famous contemporaries include:

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1938–): Kenyan novelist who argues that African writers should write in their native languages, not English, in order to rebuild the African literary tradition.

Vaclav Havel (1936–): Czech playwright who helped lead the Velvet Revolution that ended communism in Czechoslovakia; elected the first president of the Czech Republic (1989).

V. S. Naipaul (1932–): British novelist and travel writer of Indian and Trinidadian descent, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (2001), and knighted by Queen Elizabeth II (1990).

Kofi Atta Annan (1938–): Ghanian diplomat and seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations; co-recipient (with the United Nations) of the Nobel Peace Prize (2001).

Bernard Kouchner (1939–): French physician who cofounded Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) as a result of the humanitarian crisis in Biafra during its brief independence.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (1938–): President of Liberia; the first elected female head of state in Africa.

volume *Beware*, *Soul Brother*, *and Other Poems* (1971; later revised, enlarged, and republished in the United States as *Christmas in Biafra and Other Poems*, 1973).

Thirteen of Achebe's short stories, collected as *Girls at War and Other Stories*, were published in 1972. In 1975 Achebe published a volume of fifteen essays, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, written between 1962 and 1973, on various literary and political subjects.

In 1983, in the face of an impending federal election, he published *The Trouble with Nigeria*. The final chapter, "The Example of Aminu Kano," comments on the qualities of the ideal leader for Nigeria in Achebe's view, and praises Muslim politician Aminu Kano. Kano died before the election, and Achebe was asked to become a presidential candidate. Instead he became the deputy national president, an honorary title. Before the election was held, however, the military intervened, resulting in a coup. It has been suggested that Achebe's words in part prompted this action.

In 1986 Achebe was awarded the Nigerian National Merit Award for the second time. In his acceptance speech he acknowledged that literature is central in the quest to achieve the goal of creating a modern Nigeria.

Later Work Emphasizing West African Traditions Achebe confirmed his place as the leading African novelist with the publication of Anthills of the Savannah (1987). One of Achebe's primary interests in the novel is the way in which Nigeria's oral tradition, devalued by European colonizers and considered inferior to the tradition of written literature in Europe, is withering. This novel is set in the fictional West African country of Kangan, which resembles Nigeria. Achebe aims at reclaiming the art of storytelling in a society in which oral wisdom is in danger of dying out because of the increasing development of modern technocratic society. The communal and public act of storytelling also is yielding to the private form of the printed word. Anthills of the Savannah reveals that the two distinct forms of communication can meet and assist in closing the gap between the educated and the uneducated, so that the story is capable of fulfilling its traditional role. In this way, Achebe seems to be suggesting that Nigeria can make economic and social progress in the modern world without abandoning its cultural heritage in favor of European models. Anthills of the Savannah was well received and earned Achebe a nomination for the prestigious Booker Prize.

Achebe's next book, *Hopes and Impediments:* Selected Essays 1965–1987 (1988), essays and speeches written over a period of twenty-three years, is perceived in many ways to be a logical extension of ideas in *Anthills of the Savannah*. In this collection, however, he is not addressing the way Africans view themselves, but rather how Africa is viewed by the outside world. The central theme is the destructive impact of racism that is inherent to Western traditional attitudes regarding Africa.

Still Writing and Working Despite Injury In 1990, only weeks after attending a celebration for his sixtieth birthday, Achebe was paralyzed in an accident in Nigeria. Despite this, he has continued to publish, teach, and appear in public. He moved to the United States for therapy and has lived there, "a reluctant refugee," according to Oluwole Adujare in an African News Service review, during a dark time of Nigerian dictatorship.

At Achebe's seventieth birthday celebration at Bard College, Wole Soyinka commented that "Achebe never hesitates to lay blame for the woes of the African continent squarely where it belongs." In 2007 he was awarded the Man Booker International Prize for fiction.

Works in Literary Context

Africa, as an exotic place filled with "unknowable" people, has figured prominently in European literature and in the European imagination. Achebe has distinguished himself as a writer by presenting Africa from an African perspective and by pointing out the ways in which European cultural prejudices have affected not only the way Africa and Africans have been portrayed in literature and popular culture, but how Africa and Africans have been treated by imperial powers.

The Decision to Write in English In order to recognize the virtues of precolonial Nigeria, chronicle the

ongoing impact of colonialism on native cultures, and expose present-day corruption, Achebe had to clearly communicate these concerns first to his fellow countrymen but also to those outside his country. Instead of writing in his native language, Achebe judged the best channel for these messages to be English, the language of colonialism. He did so because he wished to repossess the power of description from those, like Joseph Conrad, Joyce Cary, and H. Rider Haggard, who had, as he said, secured "an absolute power over narrative" that cast Africans as beasts, savages, and idiots. Achebe views the English language not as an enemy, "but as a tool."

Reclaiming the Oral Tradition Since the 1950s, Nigeria has witnessed "the flourishing of a new literature which has drawn sustenance both from traditional oral literature and from the present and rapidly changing society," writes Margaret Laurence. As she maintains, "Chinua Achebe's careful and confident craftsmanship, his firm grasp of his material and his ability to create memorable and living characters place him among the best novelists now writing in any country in the English language."

"Proverbs are cherished by Achebe's people as . . . the treasure boxes of their cultural heritage," explains Adrian A. Roscoe. "When they disappear or fall into disuse . . . it is a sign that a particular tradition, or indeed a whole way of life, is passing away." Achebe's use of proverbs also has an artistic aim, as Bernth Lindfors suggests. "Proverbs can serve as keys to an understanding of his novels because he uses them not merely to add touches of local color but to sound and reiterate themes, to sharpen characterization, to clarify conflict, and to focus on the values of the society."

Works in Critical Context

Achebe's five novels to date follow some one hundred years of Igbo civilization. Europeans have not yet penetrated Umuofia, the setting of the first novel, when it begins. Over the course of the novels, colonial rule is established, significant change takes place, and the character of the community—its values and freedoms—are substantially and irrevocably altered. They therefore form an imaginative history of a segment of a major group of people in what eventually became Nigeria, as seen from the perspective of a Christian Igboman.

Anthony Daniels wrote of Achebe's novels in the *Spectator*, "In spare prose of great elegance, without any technical distraction, he has been able to illuminate two emotionally irreconcilable facets of modern African life: the humiliations visited on Africans by colonialism, and the ... worthlessness of what replaced colonial rule." Set in this historical context, the novels develop the theme of what happens to a society when change outside distorts and blocks the natural change from within and offer, as Eustace Palmer observed, "a powerful presentation of the beauty, strength, and validity of traditional life and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The diversity found on the planet Earth is truly astounding and comprises a vast array of unique traditions, languages, customs, and beliefs. While this diversity can be an endless opportunity for learning and tolerance, it is often the seed of mistrust, discrimination, and hatred. Here are some titles that deal with oppression and prejudice.

Dia's Story Cloth (1992), by Dia Cha. Memoir of growing up in a Hmong family that struggles to maintain ties to their culture once they are removed from Cambodia, their native land.

Shame (1997), by Tasalina Nasarina. This novel examines the consequences of Muslim retaliation to the destruction of a mosque in Ayodhya, India, by Hindu extremists in 1992

Once Were Warriors (1990), by Alan Duff. The Hekes are a modern-day Maori family living in a slum in Auckland, New Zealand. They are torn between their native culture and the Pakeha (white) world in which they are forced to live.

Le Père Goriot (Father Goriot) (1834), by Honoré de Balzac. Set in the new middle-class industrial life of France following the Napoleonic Wars, a brutal climate of early capitalism pervades society; money and power are everything, and love is merely a means to an end.

A Bend in the River (1979), by V. S. Naipaul. In this novel about a Muslim Indian trader in early postcolonial Zaire, the clash of cultures, mistrust, and anxiety are clear signs of Africa's colonial past.

Pilgrims in Aztlán (1974), by Miguel Méndez. Written in Spanish, in a style that reflects the author's native Mexican oral tradition, the stories in this complex and dense novel speak out for the growing silences in his traditions.

values and the disruptiveness of change." Even as he resists the rootless visions of postmodernist globalization, Achebe does not appeal for a return to the ways of the past.

Things Fall Apart "In 1964... Things Fall Apart became the first novel by an African writer to be included in the required syllabus for African secondary school students throughout the English-speaking portions of the continent," writes Charles R. Larson. Later in the 1960s, the novel "became recognized by African and non-African literary critics as the first 'classic' in English from tropical Africa," he adds.

Ghanaian writer and critic Kofi Awoonor writes: "Achebe's thematic construction and dramatisation of the conflict in *Things Fall Apart* utilises the 'chi' concept—'chi' being the dominating ambiguous force in the life of an

individual. The structure of the novel is firmly based in the principles that are derived from this piece of Igbo ontological evidence. Okonkwo's life and actions seem to be prescribed by those immutable laws inherent in the 'chi' concept. It is the one significant principle that determines the rhythm and tragic grandeur of the novel. Okonkwo's rise and fall are seen in the significant way in which he challenges his 'chi' to battle."

Arrow of God The artistry displayed in Arrow of God has drawn a great deal of attention, adding to the esteem in which Achebe is held. Charles Miller commented that Achebe's "approach to the written word is completely unencumbered with verbiage. He never strives for the exalted phrase, he never once raises his voice; even in the most emotion-charged passages the tone is absolutely unruffled, the control impeccable." He concludes, "It is a measure of Achebe's creative gift that he has no need whatever for prose fireworks to light the flame of his intense drama."

"With remarkable unity of the word with the deed, the character, the time and the place, Chinua Achebe creates in these two novels [Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God] a coherent picture of coherence being lost, of the tragic consequences" of European colonialism, suggested Robert McDowell in a special issue of Studies in Black Literature dedicated to Achebe's work. "There is an artistic unity of all things in these books, which is rare anywhere in modern English fiction."

Anthills of the Savannah Larson states, "No other novel in many years has bitten to the core, swallowed and regurgitated contemporary Africa's miseries and expectations as profoundly as Anthills of the Savannah."

Nadine Gordimer commented in the *New York Times Book Review* that *Anthills of the Savannah* is "a work in which twenty-two years of harsh experience, intellectual growth, self-criticism, deepening understanding and mustered discipline of skill open wide a subject to which Mr. Achebe is now magnificently equal." It is a return to the themes of independent Africa informing Achebe's earlier novels but it gives the most significant role to women, who invent a new kind of storytelling, offering a glimmer of hope at the end of the novel. "This is a study of how power corrupts itself and by doing so begins to die," wrote *Observer* contributor and fellow Nigerian Ben Okri. "It is also about dissent, and love."

Responses to Literature

1. Colonialism is defined by Merriam-Webster's Dictionary as "control by one power over a dependent area or people." How would the definition change if it read "control by one power over another area or people?" Which definition do you think Achebe would be more in agreement with?

- 2. Certain social movements choose to use negative or pejorative terms as terms of pride. But these words can still be hurtful if spoken by an outsider. Can language and words really be reclaimed, or should one reject the language used by the colonizer or oppressor?
- 3. Research a common American idiom or expression. Write an essay discussing its obvious meaning, as well as what its literal meaning implies about American culture. How would you explain it to someone unfamiliar with American culture?
- 4. Africa is sometimes seen by Westerners as one country with one culture. In fact, Africa is the name of the continent, and it is made up of forty-eight countries and hundreds of ethnic groups, cultures, and languages. Research three writers from different African countries, and write an essay examining the similarities and differences in their outlooks. What, if anything, do they have in common, apart from the experience of colonization?

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Peter Ackroyd

BORN: 1949, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde (1983)

T. S. Eliot: A Life (1984)

Hawksmoor (1985)

The Life of Thomas More (1998)

London: The Biography (2000)



Peter Ackroyd David Levenson / Getty Images

Overview

Considered an accomplished, versatile writer, Peter Ackroyd has authored works ranging from poems to novels, criticism to biography. Ackroyd came to literary prominence as a biographer, and his well-received volumes on literary giants T. S. Eliot and Charles Dickens were complemented by his novels that frequently fictionalize the lives of famous historical personalities, such as Oscar Wilde and Thomas Chatterton. In addition to fusing history and fiction, Ackroyd's novels also consider the nature of time and art, often involving the protagonist in situations that transcend time and space.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Working-class Upbringing Peter Ackroyd was born in Paddington Hospital on October 5, 1949, the only son of Graham Ackroyd and Audrey Whiteside. His parents separated a short time after his birth, and he settled with his mother in East Acton, where he lived in a council house near Wormwood Scrubs jail until the age of seventeen. Very little is known about Graham Ackroyd. Audrey Whiteside worked as a personnel officer for a firm that made metal boxes. Their son was educated by Benedictine monks at Saint Benedict's School in the

Borough of Ealing, on the western edge of Greater London, at the end of the District Line on the London underground railway system. His interest in the geography of London began at an early age. As he told Francis Gilbert in 1999, "My grandmother would often take me into the city and show me things like the Old Curiosity Shop in Portsmouth Street, Holborn—which isn't actually the original shop that Dickens based his novel upon. This was something I found out when I was researching my biography of Dickens."

Difficult Transition to Life at Cambridge In 1968, Ackroyd enrolled at Clare College, Cambridge, where he took a degree in English in 1971. As a workingclass student funded by a local authority grant, Ackroyd found the transition to Cambridge life difficult at first. According to Gilbert, Ackroyd tried to disguise his London accent when he arrived at the university: "I spent hours trying to get certain vowel sounds right. I still sometimes get them wrong and slip into Cockney." After graduation, Ackroyd was awarded a Mellon Fellowship at Yale University, where he spent two years doing graduate work. He returned to England in 1973 as literary editor of The Spectator, a right-wing weekly political magazine. In 1978, he became joint managing editor at The Spectator, a post he held until 1982, when he resigned to write full time. By then he had completed one novel, The Great Fire of London (1982), an interpolation of historical and present day

Ackroyd used the pattern he established in *The Great Fire of London* (1982) for a number of his later novels, including *Hawksmoor* (1985) and *The House of Doctor Dee* (1993). This strategy proved successful and *Hawksmoor* won both the Whitbread Novel Award and the *Guardian Fiction Prize*. Likewise, *Chatterton* (1987) is a complex exploration of forgery.

Career as a Novelist Ackroyd's other novels include First Light (1989), a creative distillation of English history; English Music (1992), which views English history through the lens of myths and traditions; The House of Doctor Dee (1993), which explores the lesser seen aspects of London's history. The book employs a dual narrative form, told in turns by Matthew Palmer, a contemporary researcher, and John Dee, the Elizabethan alchemist, both inhabitants of the same house in Clerkenwell; Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem (1994) combines murder with the arena of a Victorian music hall; and in Milton in America (1996), Ackroyd creates "New Milton," a Puritan community founded and governed by a poet.

A Private Life Ackroyd is reticent about the details of his private life, but it is known that for many years he shared a house with his partner, Brian Kuhn. After Ackroyd won several lucrative literary prizes, he and Kuhn moved in 1990 to a cottage in Lyme Regis and then, in 1993, to a large house in north Devon, with a swimming pool, lake, and park. When Kuhn died from an

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ackroyd's famous contemporaries include:

Karen Tei Yamashita (1951–): Japanese-American author whose works emphasize the necessity of multicultural communities in a globalized age.

Mo Yan (1955–): Chinese novelist whose work has frequently been banned by the Chinese government.

Bob Marley (1945–1981): Jamaican singer and songwriter whose songs include "I Shot the Sherriff," "Jamming," and "One Love."

Mikhail Baryshnikov (1948–): Russian-born ballet dancer, often cited as one of the best of the twentieth century.

Woflgang Puck (1949–): Austrian chef and restaurant

Alan Rickman (1946–): Winner of a number of acting awards, this English actor plays Severus Snape in the *Harry Potter* films.

AIDS-related illness in 1994, Ackroyd sold his Devon property and moved back to London.

Expansion into Other Genres Ackroyd's other literary efforts include poetry, short stories, literary criticism, a variety of non-fiction works, and a play. London: The Biography (2000) was awarded the South Bank Show Annual Award for Literature. The Collection: Journalism, Reviews, Essays, Short Stories, Lectures (2001) collates essays on literature and film. Illustrated London (2003) was short-listed for the 2003 British Book Awards Illustrated Book of the Year. Ackroyd's most recent book about London is Thames: Sacred River (2007). Ackroyd's first play, The Mystery of Charles Dickens (2000), was directed by Patrick Garland and Dickens: Public Life and Private Passion (2002) was accompanied by a three-part BBC TV series. The Plato Papers (1999) is set 2000 years in the future where the citizens of London remember a dark historical era, 1500-2300 C.E.. The Clerkenwell Tales, a story of adventure and suspense set in the late medieval world, was published in 2003, followed by The Lambs of London, in 2004, and The Fall of Troy (2006). Most recently, Ackroyd has published Poe: A Life Cut Short (2008).

Peter Ackroyd continues to write from his home in London.

Works in Literary Context

In his fiction, Ackroyd focuses upon the interaction between artifice and reality. He emphasizes the ways in which contemporary art and life are profoundly influenced by events and creations of the past. Often described as pastiches—collages of literary elements—Ackroyd's novels blend historical and invented material, parody, multiple narratives, and self-reflexive techniques to explore the lives and writings of such noted personages as Oscar Wilde, Nicholas Hawksmoor, and Thomas Chatterton.

The Great Fire of London: A Paradigm for Understanding Ackroyd's Writing Many of the elements of Ackroyd's later fiction are present in his first published novel, The Great Fire of London: the intersection of past and present, the detailed London urban setting, strong echoes of the works of Dickens, a talent for mimicry, and a concern with recording everyday speech. The Great Fire of London was respectfully reviewed as a good Dickensian pastiche, but it did not generate the level of excitement that greeted Ackroyd's more-mature novels.

There is an element of deception in the title of Ackroyd's novels, especially as the first four, The Great Fire of London, The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde, Hawksmoor, and Chatterton could be the titles of historical or biographical studies rather than works of fiction. The fire in *The Great Fire of London* is not that of 1666, an event referred to in Hawksmoor, but an apocalyptic fictional one that begins with the burning of a film set for a screen adaptation of Little Dorrit (1855-1857) by Charles Dickens. As if to substantiate his theoretical point that writing emerges from other writing rather than from life, Ackroyd draws on Dickens's novel in many ways, thus emphasizing the fictionality of his own fictional world, however realistic it may appear in some respects. Indeed, Ackroyd's novel is centrally concerned with the human drive to create fictions in life as well as in art. The short opening section of The Great Fire of London, "the story so far," outlines the plot of Little Dorrit and ends: "although it could not be described as a true story, certain events have certain consequences"—including, of course, the writing of Ackroyd's novel. Dickens's eponymous heroine and the novel itself feature prominently in the minds of many of Ackroyd's characters. The setting of much of Little Dorrit, the Marshalsea Prison, also provides a link between the two novels because its site is visited by several of Ackroyd's characters. With its panorama of London in the 1980s from left-wing activists to gay bars, The Great Fire of London is at least as much a London novel as Little Dorrit. Ackroyd's narrative structure, in which several strands begin in parallel and gradually intertwine and coalesce, is itself derived from Dickens's methods and techniques, especially in his later novels such as Little Dorrit.

Mock Biography Ackroyd's second novel, The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde (1983), is his first mock autobiography. The book is presented as a journal that Oscar Wilde kept secretly between his arrival in Paris after being released from Reading Gaol, where he had served a sentence of hard labor for acts of gross indecency, and his death on November 30, 1900. The novel is a richly

imaginative blend of recorded fact and Wildean epigrams, demonstrating Ackroyd's ability to enter into the language and mindset of his historical subject.

Works in Critical Context

By the time Ackroyd published his first novel in 1982, he was already well known in the literary world as a poet, critic, literary theorist, and cultural historian. He was published first as a poet; his first book, London Lickpenny, prompted a Times Literary Supplement reviewer to deem him "a delicate and insistent stylist" whose words "[make] not only an odd poetry, but a poetry out of the oddness of the world." Since his début as a novelist, he has further enhanced his reputation as a non-fiction writer, first with his award-winning biography of T.S. Eliot and more recently with his imaginatively daring biography of Charles Dickens. Glen M. Johnson, explains that "as his career has developed, Ackrovd has sought 'a new way to interanimate' biography and fiction." Before the appearance of his first novel, it seemed that his writing career was likely to develop in the fields of literary criticism and biography, but with five novels in quick succession between 1982 and 1989 he established himself as one of the most gifted and imaginative English novelists to have emerged during the recent past. Critical opinion differs about whether his strikingly original talent is taking the right direction, but there is little disagreement about his potential.

The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde Ackroyd's The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde, a novel purporting to be Wilde's autobiography, was supposedly written during the final months of Wilde's life when he was living in Paris, where he had fled in self-imposed exile after serving two years in a British prison for indecency. Many critics praised Ackroyd's duplication of Wilde's own writing style and commended the work for its compelling insights into the notorious Irish writer. Toronto Globe and Mail critic William French, for instance, commented that Ackroyd "does an uncanny job of assuming Wilde's persona." Similarly, London Times reviewer Mary Cosh, who called Ackroyd's novel "a brilliant testament in its own right," lauded Ackroyd for fashioning a wellrounded portrait of Wilde. Cosh writes, "Not only does Peter Ackroyd exert a masterly command of language and ideas that credibly evokes Wilde's sharp wit in epigram or paradox, but he captures the raw vulnerability of the man isolated behind his mask." Although the novel sustains a voice approximating that of the Irish playwright for nearly two hundred pages, some critics assert that Ackroyd's Wilde never quite matches the epigrammatic wit of the original. Writing for TLS: The Times Literary Supplement (April 28, 1989), critic Claude Rawson estimated that the fictional Wilde "strikes me as being about 70 per cent convincing to knowing readers and probably more to others." Andrew Hislop, also writing in TLS

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ackroyd is often classed as historical fiction. Many authors and filmmakers have worked on historical fiction. Here are some recent examples:

The Other Boleyn Girl (2001), a novel by author Philippa Gregory. This work concerns itself with the sister of Anne Boleyn, Mary Boleyn, and analyzes the treatment of women in sixteenth-century England.

Marie Antoinette (2006), a film directed by Sofia Coppola. In this work, Coppola attempts to humanize the reviled historical figure Marie Antoinette by portraying the loneliness of her life as a French queen.

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford (2007), a film directed by Andrew Dominik. Based on the actual assassination of Jesse James by Robert Ford, this work (adapted from a novel of the same name) imagines a fictional relationship between the two men, and in so doing, offers a painful portrayal of fame and infamy.

(April 15, 1983) went further to claim that *The Last Testament* was "consummate ventriloquism, so Wildean that it was easy to forget that it was make-believe and the result of research, hard work and a brilliant ear."

T. S. Eliot: A Life When The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde was published in 1983, Ackroyd was already working on the biography T. S. Eliot: A Life. In researching the poet's life, Ackroyd encountered imposing obstacles: he was forbidden by Eliot's estate from quoting Eliot's correspondence and unpublished verse, and he was allowed only minimum citations of the published poetry. Critics generally agreed, however, that Ackroyd nonetheless produced a worthwhile account of the modernist poet. As A. Walton Litz writes in the New York Times Book Review, "Given all these restrictions, Peter Ackroyd has written as good a biography as we have any right to expect. He has assimilated most of the available evidence and used it judiciously." Rosemary Dinnage of the New York Review of Books, also praised Ackroyd's difficult feat, observing that he "illuminates Eliot's poetry and criticism more acutely than many a ponderous academic volume." And Newsweek's Paul Gray contended that Ackroyd's biography "does more than make the best of a difficult situation; it offers the most detailed portrait yet of an enigmatic and thoroughly peculiar genius." In the end, Ackroyd acknowledged to Contemporary Authors that his inability to quote Eliot's letters or work made for a better book because "I had to be much more inventive about how I brought him to life," T. S. Eliot: A Life won both the Whitbread Biography Award and the Heinemann Award.

Responses to Literature

- How does Ackroyd's use of historical figures and details differ from other authors of historical fiction? Do you believe that these distinctions justify Ackroyd's insistence that he does not write historical fiction? Why or why not? In your response, make sure to cite specific examples from your chosen texts.
- 2. Read Ackroyd's *The Great Fire of London* and Dickens's *Little Dorrit*. It has been argued that Ackroyd's text is a kind of continuation of the Dickens novel. After having read both, why do you think Ackroyd featured *Little Dorrit* so prominently in his own novel? Would the novel stand without all the references to the Dickens text? Support your response with passages from each novel.
- 3. Give historical fiction a shot. Choose an important historical person or event, research it—using the library and the Internet—and then write a short story or film that incorporates both historical fact and imaginary elements. Then, in a short essay, describe the choices you made and your experience of writing historical fiction.
- 4. Using the Internet and the library, research the life and writings of Oscar Wilde. Then, read Ackroyd's *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*. Some feel Ackroyd truly captures the voice of Wilde in this text, while others are not so sure. After having researched Oscar Wilde and having read Ackroyd's novel, how well do you think Ackroyd represents his main character—in terms of voice and character?

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Douglas Adams

BORN: 1952, Cambridge, England

DIED: 2001, Santa Barbara, California, USA

NATIONALITY: British
GENRE: Fiction, screenplays

MAJOR WORKS:

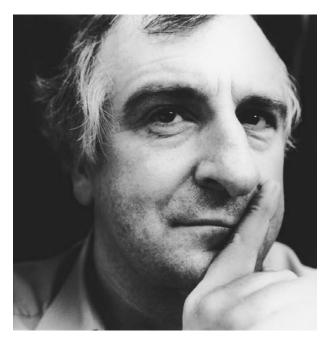
The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (1979)

The Restaurant at the End of the Universe
(1980)

Life, the Universe and Everything (1982) So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish (1984) Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency (1987)

Overview

Douglas Adams is best known for the series of interrelated books that began with his popular first novel, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979). Mixing deadpan humor, black comedy, and satire, these works use elements from the science fiction genre to portray a chaotic universe populated by such entities as chattering objects and bizarre alien creatures with ridiculous names. Originally written as a series of radio scripts broadcast on British Radio, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* has proved immensely popular, generating a theater production, a television series, audio recordings, and four sequels to the novel. Although some critics label Adams a science fiction writer, Adams has asserted that he is a "comedy writer" who merely uses "the devices of science



Douglas Adams Steve Pyke / Getty Images

fiction to send up everything else. The rest of the world . . . is a better subject to take than just science fiction."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Footlights Revue and Doctor Who Douglas Noel Adams was born in Cambridge on March 11, 1952, the son of Christopher Douglas Adams and Jane Dora Donovan Adams. He was educated at Brentwood School in Essex and then at St. John's College, Cambridge. At Cambridge, Adams was a member of the Footlights revue group. Following in the tradition of previous members who had gone on to develop such shows as Beyond the Fringe and Monty Python's Flying Circus, Adams eventually formed his own revue group, Adam Smith Adams, for which he wrote, performed, and sometimes directed shows produced in London and Cambridge and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Adams's work belongs to a peculiarly English (and particularly Oxford and Cambridge) tradition of student comedy. Like "Oxbridge" satire—which has been criticized for focusing on parody, pastiche, and selfconscious cleverness while rarely entering into the realm of politics—Adams's comic novels are indebted to satirical sketch writing and undergraduate humor, while avoiding direct treatment of political controversy.

On graduating from Cambridge in 1974, Adams began to write for radio and television. During 1978–1980 he was script editor for the science fiction series *Doctor Who* and wrote several episodes of the cult show. Traces of its influence may be found in Adams's fiction. Like Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Doctor Who* addresses, in a futuristic setting, anxieties about contemporary science, technology, and culture. Like the scripts of *Doctor Who*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series plays with obscure scientific language and flirts with the dangers of technology, opposing the ordinariness of daily life against the extraordinary possibilities of technology.

The Hitchhiker's Guide The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy had its origins as a series for BBC radio, first broadcast in 1978. After a trip across Europe, inspired by the format of practical travel guides such as The Hitchhiker's Guide to Europe by Ken Welsh, Adams set out to write a guide to the mysteries of the galaxy. With the reassuringly familiar voice of Peter Jones, a BBC radio celebrity, as "The Book," the radio series was self-consciously comic.

In 1979 Adams reworked the radio script as a novel. In *The Hitchbiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the "Galactic Hyperspace Planning Council" has scheduled the planet Earth for demolition in order to build a "hyperspatial express route." After this wholesale destruction of the Earth in the opening pages of the text, Adams went on to create a range of new worlds, all of which are used to parody the vagaries of twentieth-century Britain, just as Jonathan Swift satirized eighteenth-century England in

his works. Adams wrote four sequels, creating a five-book series that was originally—and later, with tongue in cheek—promoted as a trilogy: The Restaurant at the End of the Universe (1980), Life, the Universe, and Everything (1982), So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish (1984), and Mostly Harmless (1992). The third novel was originally conceived by Adams as a film idea for the character of Doctor Who prior to working on that show as a script editor.

Popular Success and a New Franchise The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy and its sequels became huge successes, spawning a 1979 theatrical performance directed by Ken Campbell and a television production in 1981, as well as a record album and a computer game. The reassuring "Don't Panic"—emblazoned on the cover of "The Book"—became a familiar catchphrase and appeared on badges. The influence of the original series remains apparent in several radio and television imitations—among them the cult British television-comedy series Red Dwarf—as well as in contemporary television and radio commercials that replicate the reassuring and all-knowing voice of "The Book" and employ versions of Adams's creative space-alien creatures.

Adams was also the author of two parodic detective novels, Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency (1987) and The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul (1988), both located in a world that bears a marked resemblance to the landscapes of Adams's childhood and student years at Cambridge. Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency was heavily influenced by two Doctor Who episodes written a decade earlier by Adams, with several plot elements borrowed from the original episodes and used in the novel. Once again, Adams used a traditional form of popular fiction to address the preoccupations of the contemporary world. Like Arthur Dent, the protagonist of the Hitchhiker series, Dirk Gently attempts, in a frustratingly inconsequential world, to tie up all the loose ends of the mysteries of life.

Champion of the Environment In 1985, Adams took an assignment to travel to various locations around the world in the company of a zoologist, documenting a search for specimens of the world's most endangered species. This resulted in both the radio series and the nonfiction book Last Chance to See (1990). Although the book was not as commercially successful as his novels, Adams referred to the book as one of the most rewarding projects on which he had ever worked. This reflects a common theme in Adams's work regarding the double-edged sword of technology, which can provide great advancements for humanity but also lead to destruction of the natural world.

Adams found it very difficult to write and once had to be confined to a hotel room by his publisher to make him finish a novel. "I would never sit down and write for pleasure because it's too much like hard work," he told the *Times of London*, so the pleasure his work continues

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Adams's famous contemporaries include:

Margaret Thatcher (1925–): British Conservative prime minister from 1979 to 1990, nicknamed "The Iron Lady" for her hard-line stance against trade unions and the Soviet Union.

Monty Python's Flying Circus: a British comedy troupe consisting of Graham Chapman, Eric Idle, Terry Gilliam, Terry Jones, John Cleese, and Michael Palin. Starting out on BBC television in 1969, Monty Python went on to produce comedy albums, movies, books, and a musical, all featuring their distinctive brand of absurd, often surrealistic humor.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989): Leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution that deposed the U.S.backed government and installed an anti-West theology.

Ken Kesey (1935–2001): an American novelist and counterculture guru who pioneered the use of psychedelic drugs and influenced the hippie movement of the late 1960s

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922–2007): American novelist especially popular during the 1960s, whose works blend science fiction, contemporary politics, and black comedy.

to give thousands of readers is the more admirable. He had moved to Santa Barbara, California, and was working on the script for a movie adaptation of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, when he died unexpectedly in 2001 at the age of forty-nine. The script was finished by Karey Kirkpatrick, and the film was released in 2005 with a dedication to Adams. Unfinished written work and other papers, essays, and speeches have been collected in *The Salmon of Doubt* (2002).

Works in Literary Context

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy pokes fun at the pomposities and incomprehensibility of computer experts and government departments. It hit a contemporary nerve in offering a hero who is as baffled by scientific language as is most of the audience; yet, it also helped to familiarize people, particularly the British, with the language of the digital organization and retrieval of data.

Fear of Change Having originated as a radio series in the year before Margaret Thatcher became prime minister, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy may, in retrospect, be seen as haunted by a fear of change and infused by a sense that the individual can no longer rely on the social order for protection. Arthur Dent, a new home-

owner, is unable to protect his investment; no benign council can save his house; and there is no state support to help him to cope with the end of the world. Like the heroine of Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), Arthur is swept into an illogical new world with an eccentric and alien guide: Ford Prefect, who becomes his hitchhiking companion, serves as the equivalent of Alice's White Rabbit. Unlike Alice, however, Arthur has been whisked away in an alien spacecraft, and while Alice finally returns to her cozy Victorian world, all that is familiar to Dent has been destroyed. Although he is allowed to return to an earlier version of Earth in later volumes, it can never be the same again. The forces of change that were so evident in the late 1970s do not allow Arthur, or the reader, any sense of stability.

Unlikely "Buddies" The central relationship between Arthur Dent, the innocent abroad, and Ford Prefect, alien being and Arthur's great chum, is the one reassuring constant of the series and also one of its great strengths. In the mold of the buddy movies of the late 1960s and the 1970s the most important relationship in The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy series is between Arthur and Ford. Their relationship celebrates male bonding while marginalizing heterosexual romance. Arthur does not have an important relationship with a woman until the fourth volume of the series, So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish. As in many motion pictures of the 1970s and early 1980s, Adams dealt with the impact of the contemporary feminist movement by almost entirely excluding women from his fiction.

Another endearing figure in Arthur's alien universe is Marvin, a depressive android who, once again, serves to combine aspects of the strange and the familiar. A reworking of the gloomy Eeyore (the donkey of A. A. Milne's 1926 book *Winnie-the-Pooh*), Marvin is afflicted by paranoia and melancholy, a deskilled worker whose superhuman intelligence is rarely utilized by the fellow travelers he regards as his inferiors. This gloomy representation of an intelligent mind wasted on the banal tasks asked of him addressed the fears and fantasies of a generation of 1980s British graduates, many of whom were facing unemployment and a great number of whom were among Adams's readership.

The Meaning of Life In The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy series, Adams flirted with such big philosophical questions as the meaning of life, the search for absolute answers in a relativistic world, and the potentiality of new technologies. He consistently set up these issues as serious problems but rarely followed through with any rigor. While the jokiness of the first radio series and novel had an engaging charm, in subsequent volumes this tone was too insubstantial to carry the philosophical weight Adams suggested. Adams intelligently set up the real problems faced by contemporary British society, but rather than

seriously pursue them, he chose to evade them with archness and witty dismissiveness. Indeed, the quest for answers and philosophical enlightenment is portrayed throughout the series as somewhat futile. Adrift in an alien and alienated galaxy, Arthur and Ford Prefect's most pressing question is, "Where shall we have dinner?" and the Restaurant at the End of the Universe is enough of an answer for them.

Works in Critical Context

Initially, reviewers praised *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, pleased to have found a book that attempted to be humorous and was, for the most part, successful. "This hilarious and irrepressibly clever book is one of the best pieces of humor to be produced this year," applauded Rosemary Herbert in *Library Journal*.

Because science fiction is a genre that often takes itself too seriously, critics have tended to take *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and its sequels as a breath of fresh air. Lisa Tuttle, writing in the *Washington Post*, compared the book's relationship to traditional science fiction novels and concluded that "it's extremely funny—a rare and precious conjunction in a field where what usually passes as humor is a bad pun at the end of a dull story."

As the series of books progressed and came to be known as The Hitchhiker Trilogy (even after the publication of the fourth and fifth novels), reviewers found it more and more resistible. John Clute, who reviewed The Hitchhiker's Guide for the Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, acknowledged that the book was a joy. He also gave recognition to the less clever elements that it involved: "Given its music-hall premises, the tone of Hitchhiker is sometimes damagingly sophomoric, and there is a constant taint of collegiate wit in the naming of silly names and the descriptions of silly alcoholic beverages." He went on to praise the novel as "one of the genre's rare genuinely funny books," but the elements that he pointed out tended to become more obvious to reviewers as they appeared in one book after the next.

Losing the element of surprise did not stop Adams from producing the series' fourth and fifth installments, and though reviewers, taking the series for granted, did not express further delight, there has been growing respect for Adams's growth as a novelist. While the first book in the series was appreciated for what it was not—a traditional science fiction comedy—Adams's later works have been praised for their characterization and plotting.

Toronto Globe and Mail reviewer H. J. Kirchhoff maintained that Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency "is Adams's best novel. That is, his characters are more fully delineated ..., the settings more credible and the plot more ... well, linear."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Douglas Adams was far from the first author to use fantastic travel to other worlds and dimensions as a means of pointing out our own society's foibles.

Gulliver's Travels (1826), a satire by Jonathan Swift. Swift applied his sharp wit to this "travelogue" of an innocent abroad in strange and unheard-of countries.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), a novel by Lewis Carroll. What started as a story told to pass the time on a boat trip turned into a novel that plays with nonsense, logic, and morality lessons in a baffling and surreal fantasy land.

Other Worlds (first published in two parts, 1657 and 1662), fantasy stories by Cyrano de Bergerac. The real-life seventeenth-century swashbuckler wrote a series of fantastic stories describing his fictional journeys to the Moon and Sun and his encounters with the creatures who lived there.

Responses to Literature

- 1. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* summarizes the whole Earth with only two words: "mostly harmless." Write up an extended entry for a guidebook that will explain your town in detail to people from other planets.
- 2. Write a poem that you think might have been written by Paula Nancy Millstone Jennings of Greenbridge, Essex, England, whose work is identified in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as the worst in the universe. Explain the elements of your poem that you think make it so terrifyingly awful.
- 3. Suppose that *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is right in saying that humans are not in control of Earth, but wrong in believing that either mice or dolphins are the most intelligent animals on the planet. Which animals do you think might actually be an intelligent species from another world, controlling human behavior wordlessly? Why do you think so?
- 4. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy satirizes the British generation of young people who came of age in the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher was British prime minister. In your library or on the Web, research the often-harsh social and economic policies of Margaret Thatcher, who was called "The Iron Lady." Does knowing about the unemployment, union-breaking, and conservative social policies of the time add or detract from your enjoyment of Adams's nonpolitical novels? How? Do you believe

then that the novels are political satires after all? The era that produced Adams's novels, also produced such British punk rock groups as the Sex Pistols. How do you account for this? What comparisons can you make between the two? Can you find comparisons between the popular music you listen to and the politics and entertainment literature of your time?

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Richard Adams

BORN: 1920, Newbury, Berkshire, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction
MAJOR WORKS:

Watership Down (1974)

Shardik (1974)

The Girl in a Swing (1980)

Tales from Watership Down (1996)

Overview

Although he is the author of seven full-length novels, Richard Adams has a reputation based almost solely on his first novel, Watership Down. A former civil servant in the Department of the Environment, Adams wrote Watership Down to introduce his daughters to literature by presenting them with the rules and principles of the adult novel. At the same time, the novel allows Adams to criticize humanity through a civilization of rabbits, asserting that nature is being destroyed by human technology. This environmental focus caught public attention in the 1970s when people were experiencing a new ecological awareness that the natural world was under threat. By using his rabbits to examine social organization, Adams presents the essential elements of a successful society: cooperation, courage, honor, religious faith, and respect.



Richard Adams Adams, Richard, photograph. AP Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Idyllic Beginnings and World War II Richard George Adams was born in Newbury, Berkshire, on May 9, 1920, the fourth child of a country doctor, Evelyn George Beadon Adams, and Lilian Rosa Adams. Nine or more years younger than his siblings, Adams played alone with imaginary friends for company, taking refuge in the shrubbery, a favorite retreat. The connection between the natural world and refuge was made when he was young, as was the habit of creating imaginary worlds. Adams looks back on his childhood as a golden age, a lost rural paradise.

This idyll ended abruptly when Adams, almost nine, was sent away to boarding school, where students were class-conscious and pretentious. The system of privileges and the severe discipline at the school instilled in Adams a respect for authority and established hierarchies. As a result, the realities of the English class system can be found in much of his work.

Adams's modern-history studies at Worcester College, Oxford, were interrupted by World War II, and he joined an airborne company of the Royal Army Service Corps. He returned to Oxford to finish his degree course in 1946. He graduated in 1948 and then entered the Home Civil Service as an assistant principal that same year. In 1949 he married Barbara Elizabeth Acland, with whom he had two daughters.

From Oral Tradition to Published Writing To pass the time during a July 1966 car trip, Adams began telling his daughters the story of two rabbits. When the girls asked him to finish the story and write it down, Adams relied on his knowledge of natural history, both from personal observation and from R. M. Lockley's The Private Life of the Rabbit, a nonfiction work considered a definitive source on rabbits. Combining a biological realism with a flair for mythmaking, Adams created Watership Down.

Watership Down was rejected seven times by various publishing houses and literary agents because of its length and difficulty for younger readers. It was finally accepted by a small-firm publisher, Rex Collings. Almost immediately, Adams was compared with Kenneth Grahame, George Orwell, and J. R. R. Tolkien. The novel won both the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Award for 1972. When Collings was unable to meet the sudden demand for the book, he sold the paperback rights to Puffin. Its 1973 edition prompted a second wave of critical acclaim, and it sold well, topping the children's paperback best seller list and the New York Times best seller list for months.

Career Shift With the enormous financial success of his first novel and the imminent publication of Shardik, his second, Adams gave up his civil service career. Since Shardik followed one of the greatest publishing phenomena of the century, publisher Allen Lane mounted a major national publishing campaign to promote it. In spite of this publicity, the novel did not have an entirely favorable critical reception. However, critical disapproval did not affect sales. Shardik was reprinted, topped the best seller list, and was, by 2002, still selling well in new edition.

Animal Rights In England, the animal rights movement had its origins in an 1822 law intended to prevent cruelty to farm animals such as cattle and sheep. After the law was passed, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) was developed as a way to enforce the law by having inspectors investigate claims of cruelty. The RSPCA grew in strength throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and additional laws were passed to provide broader protection for animals, including regulations regarding animal testing and experimentation. This movement reached new levels in England in the 1970s with the publication of Peter Singer's book Animal Liberation, as well as the formation of the activist (but officially nonviolent) animal-rights group known as the Animal Liberation Front.

In 1977 Adams published his third full-length novel, *The Plague Dogs*, a diatribe against experimentation on animals that is also a satiric attack on tabloid journalism, the press as a whole, and government bureaucracy. In 1978, Adams's activism to prevent animal cruelty led him to tour Great Britain, Canada, and the United States in a campaign protesting the fur trade in Newfoundland; he was also instrumental in lobbying the British government

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Adams's famous contemporaries include:

Isaac Asimov (1920–1992): Asimov was a Russian-born American author and professor of biochemistry who was best known for his popular science fiction.

Lionel "Rusty" Bernstein (1920–2002): This South African anti-apartheid activist, once a political prisoner, was honored for his tireless efforts to bring democracy to South Africa

Adele Faccio (1920–2007): This Italian politician was the founder of the Information Centre on Sterilisation and Abortion

Henry J. Heimlich (1920–): Heimlich was an American physician debatably known as the inventor of the Heimlich Maneuver and who was controversially regarded for his advocacy of using malaria to treat the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

William M. Gaines (1922–1992): Son of the creator and publisher of the very first comic books, Gaines himself published a number of comic book series and eventually became the publisher of *Mad Magazine*.

Alice Walker (1944–): Author of the Pulitzer Prize—winning *The Color Purple* (1982), Walker is known for her environmental and animal-rights activism.

to require importers of sealskin products to name the country of origin. In 1980 Adams was made president of the RSPCA; however, he and three vice presidents resigned from the society two years later in order to pursue the cause of animal rights in demonstrations and protests.

Continued Success In 1983 Adams moved to Hampshire, England. There he completed his fifth novel, Maia, a return to the fantasy setting of the Beklan Empire, but set twenty years before the events in Shardik. It is an immense work with eighty-four characters, many of whom have long, unfamiliar names. In 1996 Adams returned to the setting and protagonists of his first and greatest success and published Tales from Watership Down.

Works in Literary Context

The process by which Adams works is not one of invention so much as it is of discovery. In Adams's view, the story already exists in the unconscious mind, and he is merely uncovering what has already been learned as myth.

The Heroic Epic Considered a brilliant work of originality and scope, *Watership Down* is recognized as a modern classic that blurs the distinction between juvenile and adult literature. Because of the animal protagonists and the mythic settings at the center of *Watership Down* and other

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by other writers who have also personified animals in folktales or myths:

Animal Farm (1945), a novel by George Orwell. In this satirical allegory, farm animals assume the roles of Bolshevik revolutionaries who plot to take over the humanrun farmstead.

Charlotte's Web (1952), a novel by E. B. White. Charlotte the barn spider and Wilbur the pig have a friendship that endures life's many changes through the years.

The Wind in the Willows (1908), a novel by Kenneth Grahame. This pastoral adventure, with its anthropomorphized animal characters, is also a mystical, mythical morality tale.

works, Adams is often perceived primarily as a writer of anthropomorphic fantasy. Yet *Watership Down* offers readers of all ages entry into the world of rabbits, a civilization complete with its own history, language, mythology, and government that parallels the world of man.

In several of Adams's books, the prevailing theme is the universality of the myth-driven folktale, and Adams owes much to mythologist Joseph Campbell's theories. The impact of Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces on Adams is observable throughout Watership Down. Certainly, the standard path of the mythological hero-separation, initiation, and return with some kind of gain for the community—drives the narrative structure of Watership Down. Hazel, the novel's main character, takes a small band of refugees on a hazardous quest through the English countryside to find a new home after a visionary senses the destruction of their warren by a developer. When Adams breaks the heroic narrative, it is to introduce tales about El-ahrairah, folk hero of the rabbits, and these stories explain the origins, characteristics, and beliefs that influence the behavior of Hazel and his band of refugees. Throughout the novel, the rabbits exhibit characteristics of traditional epic heroes.

Myth from the Unconscious Mind Apart from its powerful story, the most important feature of Shardik is its depiction of deep mythic levels that originate in the unconscious mind. In the early 1950s, Adams began a three-year study of Jungian analysis and learned, among other ideas, the importance of dreams and their connections with the unconscious. To achieve psychological wholeness, Jung theorized, one must believe in the existence of the collective unconscious, within which lie the archetypes from dream, myth, and folktale. Adams's study of Jungian analysis led him to create mythic figures that awaken the minds of his readers.

Adams has said that complete episodes of *Shardik* came to him in dreams.

Adams used a metaphor of an unbroken web to represent his image for the universality of folktales, where the archetypes of dreams and folktales are connected. In Jung's theories, this web figure is the collective unconscious made visible, a gossamer sphere encircling the world. After the storyteller reaches up and draws down the web while he tells his story, it springs back to encircle the world again.

Works in Critical Context

Some critics claim that the literary establishment of Britain has not accepted Adams: "Probably no other contemporary novelist suffers from so much condescension or critical dismissal from so many literary intellectuals," said Phillip Vine in *Words*. The extent of this neglect seems exaggerated, since Adams has been made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and has lunched with Queen Elizabeth II. In any case, Adams's faithful reading public ignores these critics, and his books are often listed among the best-selling fantasy and children's literature of all time.

Watership Down New York Review of Books critic Jane Adam Smith wrote that Watership Down "appears at a time when we are becoming increasingly skeptical of our species' ability to live its life decently.... In as much as Mr. Adams has a message for his readers, I'd say it is to make them more sensitive to the complex balance of nature, more aware of the needs and ways of other species (and the effect of human actions on them), more mindful that we are creatures too, and must live in harmony with the others who share our world." Voicing the general sentiment of critics, Selena Hastings wrote that Watership Down is "A beautifully written and intensely moving story, the work of an extraordinary imagination."

Alison Lurie, writing in the New York Review of Books, felt that Watership Down was successful "because it celebrated qualities many serious novelists are currently afraid or embarrassed to write about. The heroes and heroines of most contemporary novels...are sad, bumbling failures; hysterical combatants in the sex war; or self-deceptive men and women of ill will. What a relief to read of characters who have honor and courage and dignity, who will risk their lives for others, whose love for their families and friends and community is enduring and effective—even if they look like Flopsy, Mopsy, and Benjamin Bunny." Others attribute the novel's sensation to increased environmental concerns, the growth of the animal-rights movement, and a multigenerational appeal to both the conservative middle class and the student subculture. Some critics have mused that perhaps the deeper reason for Watership Down's appeal lies in its universal expression of mankind's need for refuge.

Despite critical praise and public acceptance, *Water-ship Down* has had its share of critics. In a review for the *National Review*, D. Keith Mano challenged accolades

for the novel's original premise. "This bunny squad could be a John Wayne platoon of GIs," Mano maintained. "Watership Down is pleasant enough, but it has about the same intellectual firepower as Dumbo." He continued, "If Hazel and Bigwig and Dandelion were men, they'd make very commonplace characters." Mano concluded that Watership Down "is an okay book; well enough written. But it is grossly overrated."

Shardik Shardik did not receive as much acclaim as Watership Down. The novel is set in a mythical country and time; the natives worship a giant bear, Shardik. Lurie commented that, like Watership Down, Shardik can be viewed as "an allegory and history of the relationship of human beings to the physical world." However, she judged Shardik to be more than an ecological allegory; the novel is really a study of how human beings choose and follow their gods. "The great bear," Lurie maintained, "is not really a magical being....All that he does is within the range of normal animal behavior; only to those who believe in him does it seem symbolical, an Act of God. Because of this belief, however, lives are changed utterly...and society is brought a little nearer to civilized humanism." Lurie noted that in Shardik, "belief causes men to act cruelly and destructively as well as nobly; the bear is a kind of test which brings out hidden strengths and weaknesses, even in those who do not believe in him."

As with *Watership Down*, critical praise for *Shardik* was not unanimous. Webster Schott noted in the *Washington Post Book World*: "There are few of the usual reasons for reading fiction in *Shardik*. We learn nothing about ourselves here; Adams's people belong with Snow White.... The novel is a fake antique, a sexless, humorless, dull facsimile of an epic without historical or psychological relevance." John Skow of the *Times* wrote that Adams "spins out his romance entertainingly, but without dealing seriously with... belief and its perversion, of authority and its corruption. Good as he is at nature walks, Adams does not venture far into the forests of the mind."

Responses to Literature

- 1. A major theme for Adams concerns environmentalism—both as a philosophy and a movement with a focus on conserving and improving the environment. Investigate the history of environmentalism. In your survey, identify what major environmental issues were emphasized in each decade, and consider how they have or have not changed today.
- Study the functions of the Department of the Environment in at least four different countries—choose from Australia, Canada, China, Ireland, The Philippines, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Analyze how each of your chosen countries contributes to the environmental movement as we know it today.

3. Just as the rabbits of Sandleford Warren do in *Watership Down*, work in a group to choose a problem that affects you in your personal life, your social life, your community life, or your home life. Your group is the task force and its objective is to create a plan of action for a solution to eliminate or alleviate the problem.

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■ Aeschylus

BORN: 524 BCE, Eleusis, Greece DIED: 456 BCE, Gela, Italy

NATIONALITY: Greek

GENRE: *Drama*MAJOR WORKS:

Persians (472 BCE)

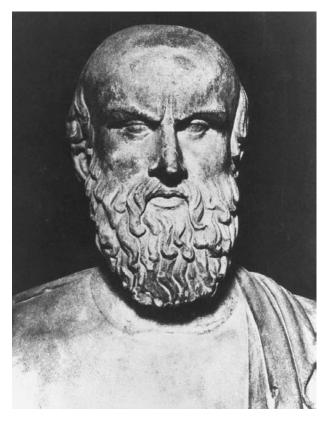
Seven Against Thebes (467 BCE)

Oresteia (458 BCE)

Prometheus Bound (unknown)

Overview

Considered the founder of Greek tragedy, Aeschylus is said to have set the paradigm for the entire genre in Western literature. His tragedies, exemplified by such seminal works as *Prometheus Bound* and the *Oresteia* trilogy, are widely praised as thoughtful and profoundly moving translations of tremendous feelings into the sublime language of poetry.



Aeschylus Aeschylus, photograph. AP Images.

Unfortunately, only seven plays of Aeschylus have survived intact.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Noble Family Aeschylus, the son of Euphorion, was born in 524 BCE, of a noble family with Athenian citizenship in the deme, or village, of Eleusis. Not far from the growing city of Athens, Eleusis was sacred to the two goddesses of grain, Demeter and her daughter Persephone. It was also the center for the Eleusinian Mysteries, a principal mystery religion in ancient Greece. In 534, about ten years before Aeschylus was born, the Athenian dictator Peisistratus transferred the cult center of Dionysus Eleuthereus ("of Eleutherae," a village on the border of Attica) to downtown Athens, just south of the Acropolis. Here Peisistratus instituted an annual festival, the Great or City Dionysia, which included public performances where songs and dances by a chorus alternated with solo recitations by a poet. In each performance, poet and chorus explored themes from the Greek myths. Before the end of the century the satyr play, a mythological farce, was added to the festival, and tragedians competed for a prize for the best play. Aeschylus began competing in 498, but did not win his first victory at the City Dionysia until 484. The success he enjoyed as a playwright for most of the fifth century was won after years

of failure. Aeschylus married and had two sons, Euphorion and Euaeon, both of whom became tragic poets.

The Battle of Marathon When Aeschylus was a young man, the armies of the Persian Empire-based in the region now known as Iran—were advancing across the city-states of Greece toward Athens. The Persians had already conquered regions to the east of Attica-where Athens and Eleusis were located—and with the superior numbers of the Persian forces, many were expecting all of Greece to become yet another territory of the Persian Empire. Aeschylus, along with thousands of other Greeks, gathered at the Plain of Marathon on the eastern coast of Attica to fend off the Persian army. Ancient sources state that the Persian soldiers were anywhere from two hundred thousand to six hundred thousand in number, though modern estimates have been much lower. The Greek forces were certainly outnumbered; however, through skillful maneuvering on the battlefield, they drove the Persian armies back to the sea with only about two hundred soldiers lost. According to some accounts, one of those lost was Aeschylus's brother Kynaigeirus. The battle was considered a decisive victory for the Greeks, and it inspired Aeschylus to write a play titled Persians.

Persecution Aeschylus's plays, often noted for their religious and theological themes, concentrate on the great Panhellenic gods, with Zeus as ruler over Hermes, Apollo, Aphrodite, and Athena. Ancient authors thought it significant that Eleusis, where Aeschylus was born, was the religious center for the Eleusinian Mysteries, a mystery religion of great importance in ancient Greece. This religion was one that prohibited its followers from revealing its teachings and its rituals. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle relates that Aeschylus was impeached for revealing the secrets of the Mysteries but pleaded ignorance. In the third century CE, Christian writer Clement of Alexandria interpreted Aristotle's point to mean that, despite his Eleusinian origins, Aeschylus was never initiated into the Mysteries. His plays confirm the idea that his religious commitments were Olympian and Hellenic, not local.

According to Heracleides of Pontus, a pupil of Aristotle, the playwright was alleged to have revealed secrets of the Mysteries in his play *Prometheus Bound*; the audience of the play tried to stone Aeschylus, and the playwright took refuge. Aeschylus was later acquitted.

Reminiscences Although little more is known or verifiable about Aeschylus's personal life, some reminiscences of Aeschylus have survived. Ion of Chios, a younger tragedian, recorded in his *Visits* that he watched a boxing match at the Isthmian Games with Aeschylus, and that one boxer received a terrible blow that made the crowd roar. "You see the importance of practice," said Aeschylus, nudging him. "The one who was hit is silent, but the spectators cry out." Ion may also be the source for Aeschylus's comment that his plays were "slices of fish

from Homer's great feasts." Aristotle's pupil Chamaeleon reports a story that Sophocles told Aeschylus: "Even if you write what is appropriate, you do not know what you are doing when you compose." The second-century CE author Athenaeus connected this remark with the story that Aeschylus composed while drunk, a story that sounds as if it might be "biographical fiction"—biographical information that is created from popular stories about a figure but that lack credibility.

Works in Literary Context

Given that Aeschylus wrote during the formative period of Greek theater and that no older dramas have survived, it is difficult to assess just how important Aeschylus was to the development of Greek tragedies for his contemporaries. However, Aristotle, writing a little over a century after Aeschylus's death, vouched for his importance in the history of the theater. Further, his continuing influence on composers and playwrights up to and including the twentieth century vindicates the important role attributed to Aeschylus in the development not only of tragedies but also of opera.

Aeschylus's Drama: His Innovations Although Aeschylus is the first playwright whose work has survived, he was not the first Athenian playwright. Much can never be resolved about the origins and earliest form of Greek tragedy, but it is widely accepted that tragedies were first performed at the festival of the Great Dionysia in about 534 BCE. This was several years before Aeschylus was born. What form such tragedies took is also largely a matter of conjecture but Aristotle was later to credit Aeschylus with introducing a second actor. If nothing else this confirms that previous tragedy had been performed by a single actor with a chorus and that Aeschylus's first work was of this nature. Aristotle goes on to state that Sophocles was the originator of the third actor and Aeschylus has clearly accepted the development by the time of the Oresteia in 458 BCE.

The importance of using more than one actor in a play may not be immediately apparent, but consider the effects one can achieve with multiple actors on stage at the same time. With only a single actor, a character can only have as his or her audience the chorus or the actual audience in attendance. However, when a playwright adds additional actors to a play, he or she is able to show the interaction between characters in order to attain higher levels of irony and tension, as audiences will inevitably be forced to evaluate the goodness or badness of each character. When a third character is added to a play, the possibilities continue to expand, for with three actors it is possible, for instance, for one to be hiding and listening to the other two without their knowing it. Consider the famous scene from Hamlet in which Hamlet is speaking with his mother in her bedroom while Polonius listens in. In this moment, the scheming of Hamlet's uncle and mother come to a head and Hamlet's

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aeschylus's famous contemporaries include:

Sophocles (496–406 BCE): Greek playwright whose most famous works focus on the life of Oedipus, including *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*.

Darius (549–485 BCE): Persian king who attempted to assert his rule over Athens in 490 BCE. His attempt was soundly thwarted.

Xerxes (519–465 BCE): Persian king and successor of Darius. Like his predecessor, Xerxes tried to invade Greece. Xerxes's attempt on Greece is retold, in part, in the 2006 film 300.

Tarquin the Proud (?–496 BCE): Last king of Rome. Upon his deposition, Rome turned into a republic, by many accounts the first of its kind, with elected officials, rather than dictators chosen based on their ancestry.

Pythagoras (c. 572–c. 490 BCE): Greek mathematician. Not only was Pythagoras important in introducing mathematics as a subject of study, his work, including the Pythagorean Theorem, is still a cornerstone of modern mathematics.

Gautama Siddhartha (563–483 BCE): A spiritual leader in India better known simply as the Buddha.

Confucius (551–479 BCE): Chinese philosopher and writer whose wisdom can be found codified in the *Analects*.

madness is confirmed when he strikes Polonius dead, supposedly thinking he is slaying a rat running around behind the curtains of his mother's window. This climactic moment in Shakespeare's play would be impossible without Aeschylus's innovations.

Because Aeschylus was writing for the Greek theater in its formative stages, he is also credited with having introduced many features that became associated with the traditional Greek theater. Among these were the rich costumes, decorated cothurni (a kind of footwear), solemn dances, and possibly elaborate stage machinery.

Legacy The ninety plays that Aeschylus wrote were performed frequently after his death, and the tragic drama remained a living tradition in the hands of his successors, Sophocles and Euripides. Tragedy also exerted a decisive influence on the development of literary criticism: Aristophanes' comedy The Frogs (405 BCE) is devoted to comparing and contrasting the tragic art of Aeschylus and Euripides, and both the literary form and specific tragedies were analyzed in Aristotle's profoundly influential treatise, Poetics (late fourth century BCE). Later, imitations of Greek tragedy written in the first century CE by the Roman playwright Seneca exerted a powerful influence on the development of European theater during the Renaissance.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Aeschylus's play *Persians* deals with the historical figure Xerxes and how his hubris—extreme confidence—leads to his ultimate demise. Arrogance has long been one of the key subjects of literature and art. Aeschylus himself was undoubtedly familiar with Homer's *Iliad*, the primary events in which are set in motion by the hubris of Agamemnon and Achilles, two soldiers who battle over women and fame. Here are some other works that have hubris as their focus:

Macbeth (c. 1603), a play by William Shakespeare. In this play, one can understand Macbeth's fateful and murderous ambition as cultivated by his hubris—his supreme pride.

Moby-Dick (1851), a novel by Herman Melville. The unforgettable Captain Ahab pursues the white whale Moby-Dick to the point of self-destruction in Melville's classic.

Absalom, Absalom (1936), a novel by William Faulkner.

Thomas Sutpen attempts to create a dynasty for himself in this Southern gothic novel.

Citizen Kane (1941), a film by Orson Welles. Welles wrote, directed, and starred in this film about the rise of fictional publishing magnate Charles Foster Kane.

Tragedy's uniting of music and drama became the guiding inspiration in the creation of opera, and Aeschylus's work provided a model for major compositions by Richard Wagner.

Works in Critical Context

Aeschylus's work earned him a number of awards, and after his *Persians* was performed, Hieron, dictator of Gela and leader of the Greeks in Sicily, invited Aeschylus to stage the play in Gela. He also later commissioned Aeschylus to write *Aetnean Women* to celebrate the refounding of the city of Etna. In other words, Aeschylus did not labor in obscurity but was honored by the critics of his time. His impact on theater is still felt today, and his *Oresteia* is still considered a great companion piece for Homer's *Iliad*, the inspiration for Aeschylus's trilogy.

Persians Aeschylus uses in this play, although not for the first time, two actors in addition to the chorus and its leader. The original addition of a second actor in the Greek theater was attributed to Aeschylus by Aristotle, who had made a survey of early drama for his *Poetics*. The second actor, by increasing opportunities for contrast and conflict, was essential for the development from choral performance to drama. The costumes ranged from impressive outfits for the chorus, Queen Mother, and Darius to Xerxes' torn rags. The play builds from sus-

pense to resolution. The emotions range from fear to pity. Greek literary critics from Gorgias to Aristotle saw this range of emotions as typical of tragedy. When the play was first performed at the Dionysia in 472 BCE, it won first prize. The play remained popular in the decades after the author's death—Aristophanes even mentions it in one of his most famous plays—and the fact that it is one of the few plays of Aeschylus to survive to modern times is an indication of the regard in which it was held.

Oresteia In 458 BCE, Aeschylus produced the Oresteia, which is the only surviving Greek trilogy and probably the playwright's last work. Oresteia includes the plays Agamemnon, Libation Bearers, and Eumenides, and the lost satyr play Proteus. As both poetry and drama, the Oresteia is generally held to be Aeschylus's masterpiece and one of the greatest works of world literature. Its themes are presented with a power of poetry and a theatrical verve and creativity that are unprecedented. The chorus of the Furies in Eumenides was remembered for generations. The third actor and a new stage set are used with startling originality and impact to underline the plays' themes. These four plays of Aeschylus are the first plays that were written for the set on which tragedy was performed for the rest of the fifth century.

Responses to Literature

- 1. In classical as well as contemporary literature, hubris is a common theme. Can you think of a figure from the real world who exhibits hubris? Who is this person? In what ways does he or she exhibit hubris?
- 2. Read one of Shakespeare's plays. Take one of the scenes in which a number of characters are present and crucial to the effect of the scene. Now, in order to understand the importance of Aeschylus's innovation of using more than one actor in a play, try to rewrite this scene for just one actor.
- 3. The concept of "biographical fiction" is important, especially when considering the lives of the ancients. Because little is known for certain about ancient figures, what we do know about them often comes in the form of stories based on some small, known fact about the figure. These stories, often false or fantastical, are called "biographical fiction," and there are a good number of these stories floating around about Aeschylus. In order to understand how biographical fiction works, do a little research on a historical figure and then write a scene in which this figure interacts with his mother. Make sure to utilize some of the facts that you know about the figure.
- 4. Compare Homer's representation of Agamemnon in the *Iliad* with Aeschylus's representation in *Agamemnon*. What are some of the key differences? What are some of the key similarities?

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S. Y. Agnon

BORN: 1888, Buczacz, Galicia, Austria-

Hungary

DIED: 1970, Tel Aviv, Israel NATIONALITY: Israeli, Polish

GENRE: Fiction
MAJOR WORKS:

The Bridal Canopy (1931)

A Simple Story (1935)

A Guest for the Night (1939)

The Day before Yesterday (1945)

Overview

S. Y. Agnon is the most distinguished author in the modern Hebrew language and a major prose writer of the twentieth century. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966. His work blends authentic Jewish heritage with European sources to comment upon the disintegration of community and spirituality in the modern world. Agnon is virtually unknown outside Israel,

mostly because his Hebrew prose, loaded with intricate wordplay and echoes of biblical and historical texts, is notoriously difficult to translate. Within the Jewish state, his standing is akin to that of William Shakespeare in England.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Fleeing the Pogroms Agnon was born Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes in 1888 in the shtetl (Jewish village) of Buczacz, in Galicia, now part of Ukraine but then belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His father, an ordained rabbi and a fur trader by profession, was a Hasidic Jew who encouraged his son to study the Bible, the Talmud, and rabbinic texts. From his mother, he acquired knowledge of German language and literature, which enabled him to read European writers in translation. When Shmuel was eight, he decided to become a poet, and at age fifteen he published his first poem in Yiddish.

While Shmuel led a sheltered childhood in the shtetl, his youth was a time of turmoil for Jews. The pogroms (persecutions) in Russia following the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881 led many to migrate westward into Europe. A smaller stream migrated into Palestine (now Israel), where the Zionist movement hoped to create a Jewish homeland. In 1907, at age nineteen, the budding writer moved to Palestine as part of the great wave of immigration known as the Second Aliyah. He became first secretary of the Jewish court at Jaffa. There he encountered the contradictory confluence of Jewish tradition and cosmopolitan Western culture that would become the focus of his writing. In 1908 he published his first story, "Agunot" (Forsaken Wives), in the journal Ha-Omer. With a slight modification to the title, he assumed his pen name—Agnon.

To Germany Agnon published his first novella, And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight, in 1912. Several literary specialists noticed this work; Arthur Rupin, a major figure in the Zionist movement, urged the aspiring writer to broaden his horizons in Berlin. In 1913 Agnon traveled to Germany, where he lived for eleven years. Fluent in German, he gave Hebrew lessons and worked for a publisher of Jewish books, all the while writing fiction.

In Berlin, Agnon met businessman Zalman Schocken, who admired the young author and became his financial patron. Schocken gave Agnon a regular stipend, permitting him to live comfortably free from financial worries and to concentrate on his writing. Schocken promised to find Agnon a publisher and redeemed his promise by becoming one himself. While in Germany, Agnon's chief work was on Hasidic folklore and legend, his tales capturing the spirit and flavor of a way of life deeply rooted in Jewish tradition.

Home to Jerusalem In 1916, during World War I, Agnon was summoned for a medical checkup and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Agnon's famous contemporaries include:

Martin Buber (1878–1965): An Austrian Jewish philosopher-theologian and associate of Agnon, Buber collaborated with Agnon on an anthology of Hasidic stories.

Boris Pasternak (1890–1960): This Russian poet and novelist was the author of *Doctor Zhivago*.

Mikhail Bulgakov (1891–1940): A Russian novelist and playwright whose satirical novel *The Master and Margarita* circulated underground in the Soviet Union.

Isaac Babel (1894–1940): A Russian Jewish playwright and short-story writer, Babel is noted for his stories of the Jews in Odessa and his novel *Red Cavalry*.

Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902–1991): This Polish American author wrote in Yiddish. His stories deal with conflicts between traditional faith and modernism.

David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973): The leader of the Zionist movement and first prime minister of Israel (1948–1953, 1955–1963).

possible conscription into the Austrian army. Horrified by the possibility of going to war, he chain-smoked and ingested a large number of pills, managing to get sick enough to avoid the draft. He remained in Berlin through the end of the war. In 1920 he met and married Esther Marx, a young woman from an affluent orthodox family. The couple had two children in Germany and remained together for fifty years.

In 1924 Agnon's home in Hamburg burned down. Everything he owned went up in flames, including his library of four thousand books and the manuscript of an autobiographical novel. The disaster had a lasting impact on Agnon, who saw the fire as an omen. Convinced that his exile had grown too long, he returned to Palestine and settled in Jerusalem. But five years later, his home was wrecked and much of his library again destroyed during the Arab riots of 1929. Fond of connecting his own life story to the annals of Jewish history, he likened these two events to the obliteration of the two temples. The feeling of homelessness, of losing one's dwelling, or simply not having a house where one can lodge, is a strong current in Agnon's work, serving as a metaphor for the precarious situation of the Jew.

Agnon settled permanently just outside Jerusalem and spent the next forty years writing in his small library-turned-office. He wrote by hand, standing at a polished wood podium. Although he had written in Yiddish as a youth, Agnon wrote his major works in Hebrew, the ancient holy tongue that had been revived in the late nineteenth century after centuries of being unspoken.

Unlike other pioneers of Jewish secular fiction, such as Sholom Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer, Agnon chose Hebrew as an outgrowth of his Zionist beliefs; he was writing for a future nation that would be located in the Middle East. The city of Jerusalem became not just Agnon's home but the central axis of his fiction, a symbol of stability and continuity in Jewish life.

Major Works The next years proved to be productive for Agnon. He dramatized the conflict between Jewish tradition and modernity in short stories, dozens of which were published in the Hebrew daily Ha'aretz, and novels. His first acclaimed novel, The Bridal Canopy (1931), concerns a Hasidic rabbi who travels through nineteenthcentury Galicia seeking a dowry for his daughters. This folk epic also portrays the decline of religious life through a protagonist whose devotion to God is obtrusively at odds with his secular surroundings. A Simple Story, his 1935 novel is anything but simple; it is a social treatise juxtaposing Jewish middle-class mores with European modernist ideas of religious and sexual freedom. Its hero, the classic schlemiel (chump) Hirshl, enters into an arranged marriage at the behest of his overbearing mother, but his obsessive love for his cousin Blume drives him to mental collapse.

Agnon's talent was at its peak in A Guest for the Night (1939), a nightmarish account of the decline of European Jewry after World War I, as related by an unnamed narrator returning to his native town. This work was inspired by Agnon's visit to his birthplace in the mid-1930s. World War I had shattered the old faith and traditions, and on the horizon loomed the still greater menace of World War II. Another major achievement, The Day before Yesterday (1945), is based on Agnon's experiences in Palestine before World War I. Set in Palestine during the Second Aliyah, the story is a bleak and critical appraisal of the Zionist endeavor that reveals the gap between lofty ideals and the dark realities of human nature.

The dreams of Agnon and the Zionists came to fruition with the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. The writer evacuated his home during the Arab-Israeli War that broke out when Israel declared its independence, returning after the end of hostilities. Annually, on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in Judaism, hundreds of thousands of synagogue congregants recite the Prayer for the Welfare of the State of Israel, which Agnon cowrote with chief rabbis Yitzhak Herzog and Ben Zion Uziel.

Agnon wrote until the end of his life, despite steadily declining health. After he was diagnosed with a heart condition in 1951, he began to sit while working. His reputation was such that when he complained to the city council about traffic noise on his street, the municipality closed the street to cars, while a sign hanging at the head of the street proclaimed to all passersby: "No cars are to enter. Agnon is writing." In 1966 Agnon received the Nobel Prize, along with the German poet and dramatist Nelly Sachs. He died in 1970. His daughter, Emuna Yaron, subsequently

collected and released many of his unpublished works, including the novel *Shira* (1971), which he had worked on for twenty-five years but left unfinished, and which she edited according to his instructions.

Works in Literary Context

Agnon was widely read and was conversant with European novelists; for example, he exalted the virtues of Gustave Flaubert. His prose is crossed with references to Scandinavian, Russian, German, and French literature. The episodic, picaresque style of *The Bridal Canopy* has brought comparisons to Cervantes's classic novel *Don Quixote*. Critics also frequently compare Agnon to Franz Kafka; both possessed the ability to create menacing psychic dreamscapes, and they share the qualities of irony and alienation, though Agnon insisted that he never read Kafka's work.

Agnon and the Jewish Canon As Agnon claimed in accepting the Nobel Prize, his major source of literary influence was the canon of Jewish literature. The Torah (Jewish Bible), Talmud, Mishnah, and commentaries by Hebrew poets and philosophers such as Moses Maimonides all suffuse his writing. In his book Tradition and Trauma: Studies in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon, critic David Patterson wrote, "The first impressions of apparent simplicity soon give way to a realization of the overtones, references and allusions arising from the author's complete familiarity with the whole vast corpus of Hebrew literature. The ancient vocabulary of Hebrew is pregnant with associations of all kinds, and the skillful juxtaposition of words and phrases can be made to yield a variety of nuances." These nuances, found in every passage of Agnon's stories, make his prose a formidable challenge for translators.

A Folk Modernist More than any other writer, Agnon advanced the idea of creating not only a new literature in Hebrew but a new culture synthesizing eastern European traditions and modern Israeli norms. While living in Germany, Agnon noted the sharp contrast between rural, traditional Jews emigrating from the shtetls and the more cosmopolitan, secular German Jews. As a writer, he could neither discard the religious tradition of Judaism nor shun the realities of modern secular life. He knew that for Jews to negotiate the twentieth century, both would be necessary. Sensing the alien aspects of European culture, he initiated a return to Jewish folk material, to the Hebrew language, and to the ancient sources. His deceptively simple, ironic prose reads as though it had been written long ago. While his stories often have the quality of folk literature, they also incorporate modern literary devices such as shifting viewpoints, nonlinear narratives, and the intermingling of fantasy and reality.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The stories and novels of S. Y. Agnon chronicle an eventful period in Jewish history, from the murderous pogroms to the founding of Israel. The following works of fiction also open a window onto the European Jewish past:

"Bontshe the Silent" (1894), a short story by I. L. Peretz. In this classic Yiddish story, a poor, pious Jew suffers, dies, and goes to heaven, where angels agree to grant his greatest wish: a warm buttered roll every morning. "Tevye the Dairyman" (1911), a short story by Sholom Aleichem. The stories of Tevye, his wife Golde, and the daughters they try to marry off inspired the famous

Broadway (and movie) musical Fiddler on the Roof. Breakdown and Bereavement (1914), a novel by Yosef Haim Brenner. A harrowing novel about the challenges faced by Zionist pioneers, this work was by an author whose encouragement was important in Agnon's early career.

Exodus (1958), a novel by Leon Uris. This historical novel about the founding of Israel was a huge best seller in the United States.

Mister Mani (1990), a novel by A. B. Yehoshua. In this acclaimed Israeli novel, six generations of a family pass along domestic secrets against the backdrop of a century of Jewish history.

Works in Critical Context

Agnon is widely regarded as the most accomplished author of fiction to have written in Hebrew. He is such a venerated figure in Israel that since 1985, his image has appeared on the fifty-shekel banknote. In 2002, when the National Yiddish Book Centre listed their one hundred greatest works of modern Jewish literature, three of Agnon's novels occupied the fourth, fifth, and sixth places. In addition, his novels and stories appear frequently as compulsory reading in Israeli schools. Yet, outside Israel, very few readers have even heard of him.

The Problem of Translation The difficulty of getting across in English the full flavor and profundity of Agnon's prose is certainly a major reason why he has not received the broad, lasting international appreciation given to other modernist giants, despite the Nobel Prize. Commentators have attributed much of the subtlety and complexity of his writing to the Hebrew language itself and its capacity to construct a web of associations. English-speaking literary scholars frequently debate whether translation can sufficiently convey the art of prose written in other languages. In Agnon's case, that question has often taken center stage. Noted American author Cynthia Ozick observed, "For decades, Agnon scholars (and

Agnon is a literary industry) have insisted that it is no use trying to get at Agnon in any language other than the original." Indeed, his nuances and dense layers of allusion challenge even Hebrew readers.

Little Known in the West Many scholars of Jewish literature have tackled Agnon. Haim Be'er, who wrote a book on the author in 1992, said, "Agnon is the centre of our cultural discourse. His work is the most frequent subject of Hebrew literary research." Little of his work was translated into English until late in his life. The illustrious American critic Edmund Wilson praised Agnon in 1956, calling publicly for him to be given the Nobel Prize, largely on the strength of *The Day before Yesterday*. The publication in English of Betrothed, & Edo and Enam: Two Tales in the summer of 1966 coincided with a wave of international critical acclaim for his earlier work that contributed to his winning the prize. Afterward, more of his works were translated; his short fiction was showcased in a volume titled A Book That Was Lost, and Other Stories (1995).

Responses to Literature

- 1. Using your library resources and the Internet, research the Zionist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In a short essay, explain how its values are reflected in the fiction of S. Y. Agnon.
- 2. Read several of Agnon's short stories and focus on the theme of community. How does Agnon convey what is special about the Jewish community? Why is the community in danger of disintegration?
- 3. Read the short story "Pisces" from *A Book That Was Lost, and Other Stories*. Discuss how Agnon's use of magic realism, folklore, humor, and irony contribute to the story.
- 4. *Agunot* is the term applied to women who have been abandoned by their husbands and are left in a state of limbo since they cannot remarry. Based on the story "Agunot," why do you think Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes took the pen name Agnon?

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Chingiz Aitmatov

BORN: 1928, Sheker, Kirghiz Republic, USSR (now Kyrgyzstan)

DIED: 2008, Nürnberg, Germany

NATIONALITY: Kirghiz GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Tales of the Mountains and Steppes (1963)

Farewell, Gul'sary! (1966)

The White Ship (1970)

The Ascent of Mt. Fuji (1973)

The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years (1981)

Overview

A prominent literary figure in the former Soviet Union and present-day Russian Federation, Chingiz Aitmatov has helped to bring the history and traditions of the Kirghiz and Kazakh peoples to world attention. His prose blends legend, myth, and realistic detail to depict the struggles of traditional cultures caught up in the rapid changes of modernization. Critical of Soviet society, but not a dissident, Aitmatov remained in the USSR and even rose to important posts in the government of Mikhail



Chingiz Aitmatov Igor Gavrilov / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

Gorbachev. The innovative style of his stories and novels helped break down the rigidities of socialist realism, and opened the way for more stylistic experimentation and creativity in Russian prose.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Literate Kirghiz The first author from the Central Asian region of Kirghizia (now Kyrgyzstan) to earn international recognition, Chingiz Torekulovich Aitmatov was born in the mountain village of Sheker on December 12, 1928. His parents were highly educated and bilingual; consequently, Aitmatov grew up with a strong knowledge of the Russian classics as well as the folklore of his native culture. During the Stalinist purge of the Communist Party in 1937, when Aimatov was nine years old, his father, a regional party official, and two uncles were arrested and shot on charges of "bourgeois nationalism." Subsequently, his aunt and grandmother taught him the oral legends and traditions of the Kirghiz people, who had no written language of their own until the late 1920s.

World War II erupted before Aitmatov entered his teens. In 1941, he left school to contribute to the war effort. One of the few literate persons in his village, he became a tax collector and secretary of the village soviet

(or council). After the war, he attended a veterinary school in Kazakhstan, earning a degree in animal husbandry in 1953. Over the next dozen years, he worked as a livestock specialist while pursuing a literary career.

Aitmatov published his first story in 1952. He translated other stories from Kirghiz into Russian, then began writing in the latter language. These early pieces helped him gain entrance into the prestigious Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow. After graduation in 1958, he returned home to work as a correspondent for the official Soviet newspaper *Pravda* and continued to write fiction.

A Critical Yet Loyal Communist The 1959 publication of his novella Jamila in the liberal journal Novi mir brought Aitmatov international recognition. The story shows some distance from the official model of socialist realism that all Soviet authors were expected to follow. The heroine abandons her husband from an arranged marriage to be with her true love, a war deserter and thief. Aitmatov presents her actions in a positive light. Kirghiz critics denounced the work as demeaning and unrepresentative of their culture, but it was widely translated and published abroad.

Aitmatov joined the Communist Party in 1959. He soon became an influential public figure, serving on the editorial boards of important publications, including *Novi mir*, as well as being a member of the Soviet Writers' Union. One of Aitmatov's singular achievements is that he remained a party member in good standing despite the critical perspective on Soviet life that appears in much of his writing. The government of Nikita Khrushchev awarded Aitmatov the Lenin Prize in 1963 for his collection *Tales of the Mountains and Steppes*, which reprints several stories, including *Jamila*.

Aitmatov was decorated again with the State Prize for Literature for his novella *Farewell*, *Gul'sary!* (1966). This work draws parallels between the lives of an elderly Kirghiz peasant, Tanabai, and the racehorse he formerly owned, Gul'sary. Tanabai's reminiscences reveal how the indifference and corruption of local Communist Party bosses caused suffering to both man and animal.

The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years Three of Aitmatov's most popular stories appeared in the 1970s. These stories, presented from a child's perspective, blend traditional myth and Soviet reality. In The White Ship (1970), an orphan raised on the traditional values of his grandfather is unable to accept the evils of contemporary Soviet life and kills himself. The Cranes Fly Early (1975) is semiautobiographical, concerning a group of boys taken from school during World War II to help with the war effort. "Piebald Dog Running along the Shore" (1977) takes place in the Soviet Far East among the minority Nivkh peoples; the exotic locale, details of the traditional culture, and the compelling plot of a boy's initiation into manhood that goes terribly wrong, were enormously appealing to the Soviet public. Critics attacked the tragic

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aitmatov's famous contemporaries include:

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008): This Russian dissident author exposed the extent of Stalin's labor-camp system.

Günter Grass (1927–): This Polish-German novelist was one of the most controversial authors to emerge out of Germany after World War II. He is best known for his trilogy of novels that graphically capture the reactions of German citizens to the rise of Nazism and the horrors of war.

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Márquez, a Colombian novelist, is best known for his magical realist masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Carlos Fuentes (1928–): Mexico's foremost contemporary novelist, Fuentes often intertwines myth, legend, and history to examine his country's roots and discover the essence of modern Mexican society.

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Achebe is a Nigerian author whose novel *Things Fall Apart* was a breakthrough for African literature.

Joseph Brodsky (1940–1996): Brodsky, a Russian-born poet, was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1972 for his political views.

Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–): Gorbachev was the last head of state of the USSR (1985–1991); his reforms led to the breakdown of Soviet Communism.

tone of these stories, but the stories sealed Aitmatov's popularity with readers.

One of Aitmatov's more daring and well-known works is *The Ascent of Mount Fuji* (1973), a play he coauthored with dramatist Kaltai Mukhamedzhanov. This drama caused a sensation at its 1973 Moscow premiere because it openly treats the delicate subject of Soviet suppression of dissidents. Four old schoolmates meet on a mountaintop to renew their friendship but find they must confront the absence of a fifth friend, Sabur: he had denounced the government and was sent to a concentration camp. One of the four friends condemns Sabur for treason, while the other three remain silent. This psychological study of betrayal and silence was not published in the Soviet Union. In 1988, Aitmatov wrote the screenplay for a movie version.

Aitmatov's first full-length novel, *The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years* (1981), is much wider in scope than his prior work. Its three major subplots interweave elements of Kirghiz folklore, Soviet history, and science fiction. In the first subplot, a Kazhak elder reminisces as he travels to a sacred cemetery to give his friend a ritual burial. In the second, a former Russian soldier is persecuted for writing his memoirs of World War II. In the

third, astronauts on a joint Soviet American space mission discover an advanced civilization on another planet but are prevented from returning to Earth by their own governments, which fear the cultural effects of this contact. This complex work, touching on issues of intellectual freedom and cultural identity, is open to numerous thematic interpretations.

Political Work and Later Career The Place of the Skull (1986), Aitmatov's second novel, appeared in the early days of Mikhail Gorbachev's tenure as Soviet leader, as Gorbachev unrolled his reform policy called glasnost (openness). Like many works of that time, Aitmatov's novel focuses on the moral and social problems of the Soviet Union, especially drug trafficking, bureaucratic corruption, and the destruction of nature. Using a Russian rather than a Kirghiz or Kazhak as his main character, Aitmatov argues that Russians have also been cut off from their spirituality and cultural heritage.

Aitmatov became a member of the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989 and an adviser to Gorbachev. His political and diplomatic career continued after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991; he served as Russian ambassador to Luxembourg and later resided in Brussels as Kyrgyzstan's ambassador to the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). His son, Askar Aitmatov, became the foreign minister of Kyrgyzstan in 2002.

As Aitmatov became more involved with politics, his literary output declined both in quantity and quality. He published no fiction between the story collection *The Mark of Cassandra* (1995) and the novel *When Mountains Crumble* (2007). Aitmatov suffered kidney failure in May 2008 and reportedly fell into a coma; he died on June 10, 2008, in Germany.

Works in Literary Context

Chingiz Aitmatov's bilingual education exposed him to the classics of Russian literature, as well as the rich indigenous traditions of his own culture. His ability to write with a dual consciousness, connected to his own minority culture while capable of relating to the concerns of the dominant Russian culture, may in part account for his literary success.

Stretching Socialist Realism Aitmatov lost his father in Stalin's purges and clearly understood the repressive techniques the Communist regime applied toward artists, such as the requirement to write in the mode of socialist realism. Socialist realism was the term applied to literature that furthered the ideals and aims of the socialist Soviet government, while avoiding direct criticism of the government or dwelling on otherwise "frivolous" subjects. Since art was considered a resource of society, just like food or lumber, it was subject to government approval and distribution. Yet even Aitmatov's early works depart from the tenets of the genre, and his mature stories and novels deal with sensitive topics such as government corruption, the threat to traditional cultures and languages, and even Stalin's concentration camps. A Communist himself,

Aitmatov depicted characters committed to fulfilling socialist ideals under adverse conditions. This tactic allowed him to engage controversial subjects and include unpleasant details of Soviet reality within the framework of socialist realism.

Folklore and Animal Life Aitmatov's style of drawing heavily on folklore and parables to present his ideas may be one reason his writings have not put him in disfavor with his government and party. Almost all of his stories and novels refer to a myth or folktale. Aitmatov resituates aspects of indigenous tradition into the reality of Soviet, and now Russian, society. Farewell, Gul'sary! represents this quality. The tale is strongly reminiscent of old oral epics that emphasize horses and horseback riding. As Gul'sary and his master contemplate their shared past, Aitmatov illustrates the interwoven destinies of man and animal, the concordance of man and nature so vital to the Kirghiz oral heritage. His novels The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years and The Place of the Skull both use animals to underscore the fate of the human characters. Other stories depict nature and children as innocent victims of a ruthless modern society.

The Mankurt The overriding theme of Aitmatov's fiction is the consequences that result when a group neglects its history and ancestral culture. He has even encapsulated the thrust of this social perspective in a single word: mankurt. The term derives from a Turkish myth, which Aitmatov relates to great effect in The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years. According to legend, foreign invaders would strap a camel hide onto a prisoner's head, which would painfully squeeze his skull and turn him into a mankurt—a mindless, obedient slave stripped of all memory. This myth becomes a potent symbol of the novel's underlying message. Today, in Turkey and the former Soviet republics, mankurt is used as a derogatory reference to people who embrace Western, or Russian, culture at the expense of their own national or linguistic identities. This addition to the political lexicon symbolizes Aitmatov's contribution to Russian and Central Asian life.

Works in Critical Context

Aitmatov accomplished a rare feat in Soviet cultural life: he developed a devoted following within the USSR and was decorated rather than censored by the state. In 1963, he received the Lenin Prize for literature, the highest honor the Soviet Union could bestow on an author, and he twice won the State Prize for literature (1966, 1983). This official recognition did not buy his silence; instead, it afforded him a measure of security that enabled him to take more risks. Later, he became almost a symbol of Gorbachev's liberal reforms and increased recognition of cultural diversity within the Soviet Union.

The White Ship In *The White Ship*, Aitmatov depicts the suicide of a seven-year-old boy who becomes despondent after witnessing the brutal slaying and consumption of

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Chingiz Aitmatov writes in a unique style blending traditional folklore and modern themes. The works below represent other modern attempts to draw upon the folk traditions of a variety of cultures.

The Bridal Canopy (1931), a novel by S. Y. Agnon. This folk epic, about a wandering rabbi seeking a dowry for his daughters, celebrates a disappearing Jewish culture with many vignettes filled with Jewish lore.

The Palm-Wine Drinkard (1952), a novel by Amos Tutuola. This Nigerian adventure yarn is told in a style resembling indigenous oral traditions, but with curious modern embellishments such as a "television-handed goddess."

The Lost Steps (1953), a novel by Alejo Carpentier. The protagonist of this novel travels from New York into the Amazonian jungle: as he progresses, time seems to move backward.

Ti-Jean and His Brothers (1958), a play by Derek Walcott. This folk-drama celebrates Caribbean storytelling and carnival, while subtly exploring the social consequences of colonialism.

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors (1964), a film directed by Sergei Parajanov. This hallucinatory masterwork of cinema contains many folkloric images revealing the ancient culture of the Carpathian Mountains.

a rare deer. Some Soviet readers were offended by the pessimism of the story, and the outcry against it prompted the author to defend his artistic integrity in the *Literaturnaya gazeta*. Countering suggested changes in the tale, Aitmatov was quoted in the *New York Times* as stating: "I had a choice, either to write or not to write the story. And if to write it, then only as I did." The author also asserted that evil is inexorable and, lacking the capacity to overcome the adult evil surrounding him, the boy had to sacrifice his life or his childhood ideals.

As Rosemarie Keiffer explained in *Books Abroad*, Aitmatov intended to provoke thought by allowing the young protagonist to take his own life: "The boy's fate is aimed at elucidating certain human faults: Who has been faithful to the most positive of childhood dreams? Who has measured up to the moral aspirations of adolescence? Who has remained truthful in his relations with children? Aitmatov does not pretend here to teach men how to live up to their most cherished and human ideals, only to prick their consciences with the disparities between those ideals and the realities of most people's lives."

Responses to Literature

1. Using your library resources and the Internet, research Kyrgyzstan and its culture. How does the

- work of Aitmatov reflect traditional life in Kyrgyzstan?
- 2. Does Aitmatov fit your understanding of a socialist realist writer? Citing one or more of his works, explore his contribution to this literary genre.
- 3. Look closely at the use of folklore in one or more Aitmatov stories. In a group discussion, explain how he uses folklore to make statements about the present day, or the relationship between past and present.
- 4. Write about the role of animals in Aitmatov's fiction.
- 5. What is the overall message of Aitmatov's novella, Jamila? What is Aitmatov's view toward tradition and modernism?

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Bella Akhmadulina

BORN: 1937, Moscow NATIONALITY: Russian GENRE: Poetry, Fiction

MAJOR WORKS: The String (1962)

Fever, and Other Poems (1969)

Music Lessons (1969) Dreams of Georgia (1977) Seashore (1991)

Overview

Considered one of the foremost contemporary Russian poets, Bella Akhmadulina's poetry reflects the challenges of creating literature under a repressive Communist regime. Also a noted translator of poems, especially from Georgian, she favors traditional forms and introspective topics. Born in Moscow the same year that Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin conducted purge trials of Soviet officials he believed to be disloyal, Bella Akhmadulina attended the A. M. Gorky Institute of World Literature in the mid-1950s. She was married first to the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, then to the writer Yuri Nagibin, before marrying the artist Boris Messerer in 1974.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Collections Lauded by Critics Akhmadulina, a member of the "new wave" writers who were influenced by Western ideology, began to publish poetry in the early 1960s. During this period, the Soviet Union was engaged in the Cold War with the United States while a still-repressive Communist regime ensured Soviet society operated under many government-mandated restrictions. Though Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev attempted to correct the excesses of his predecessor, Stalin, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was only limited intellectual freedom.

Akhmadulina's first two collections, *String* (1962) and *Music Lessons* (1968), contain what many critics regard as her finest poems. "Fever" and "Tale of the Rain," two of Akhmadulina's most celebrated early poems, convey her belief that creativity has a liberating effect on individuals yet leads to scorn and alienation from society.

In other noted poems from these volumes, Akhmadulina pays tribute to such literary predecessors as Anna Akhmatova, Mariana Tsvetaeva, Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov, and Alexander Pushkin. In the poem "I Swear," she vows to destroy the social forces that drove Tsvetaeva to commit suicide in the city of Yelabuga in 1941.

A Dry Spell Akhmadulina wrote very little in the 1960s and 1970s. Her works after "Tale of the Rain" explore the themes of sickness, insomnia, and suffering over her inability to write in an atmosphere of muteness, shadows, and darkness. The Soviet regime of this period was more repressive as Khrushchev had been overthrown by a conspiracy of Communist party leaders and replaced by more hard-line Communists. Dissenting members of the intelligentsia were often targeted by the new leadership's campaigns. In the mid-1970s, however, Akhmadulina's poems again began to appear regularly in the press and in a number of collections. In these poems some of



Bella Akhmadulina (left), sitting with Voznessenski, Tvardovski, and Zolina Akmadoulina, Bella, photograph. AP Images.

her old themes and images reappear, but new ones also gradually emerge.

Added Theme of Spirituality In her recent works, Akhmadulina returns to her main themes: her love of foreign lands—especially the country of Georgia; evocations of the past through visions of the specific Russian poets who influenced her; and the joys and rewards of friendship. While they always showed a profound sense of integrity and morality, her poems now are acquiring an even deeper spiritual cast. Almost Romantic in tone, Akhmadulina's poems find God and virtue in nature. Throughout her career, she has been able to transform the mundane into the whimsical, the sublime, and the wonderful. By the early 2000s, her poems had become more mature and reflective.

Works in Literary Context

While traditional in form, Akhmadulina's poetry is distinguished by her wit, emotional intensity, and inventive use of rhyme, syntax, and imagery. Consistency of formal devices, as well as symbolism, is also evident in Akhmadulina's poetry. The metrics of her poems are not distin-

guished by any new experimental forms. Rather, she gives freshness and variety to the traditional forms. Akhmadulina's early verse is characterized by her exuberant use of extended metaphors that impart a sense of wonder to ordinary objects and events. Her later poems often express melancholy or pensive moods and examine such subjects as aging and the loss of creative powers.

Flowers For Akhmadulina, flowers have always represented poems. In her early lyrics, they grow in greenhouses, protected from the elements. As she becomes more daring as a poet, she finds herself more often in gardens where the flowers grow in the open air. Flowers act simultaneously as the source of inspiration as well as its result—the poems themselves. One entire volume is called *The Garden* (1987) because each poem is a flower lying within its pages.

Love Akhmadulina's love poems share a recurrent symbolism. She finds refuge from her alienation from the crowd either in poetry or with her lover. In most cases, the man she loves shares her inspiration. Where most poets look to love for inspiration, Akhmadulina looks to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Akhmadulina's famous contemporaries include:

Joseph Stalin (1879–1953): Communist ruler of the Soviet Union from 1922 to 1953, responsible for rapid industrialization and also many deaths from famine and executions.

Rudolfo Anaya (1937–): Mexican American author best known for writing *Bless Me, Ultima*.

Bulat Okudzhava (1924–1997): Russian poet who helped start the "author's song" genre of bardlike musical performance.

Madeleine Albright (1937–): First woman to become United States secretary of state in 1996. She was nominated by President Bill Clinton and unanimously confirmed by the United States Senate before being sworn in on January 23, 1997.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko (1933–): Akhmadulina's exhusband, a Russian poet who was one of the first to denounce Stalinism.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Akhmadulina's poems refer to the process of writing poetry. This technique of calling attention to the form itself is a common writing device, which works to get the reader or viewer to focus on the artistic endeavor as well as the content. Here are some other works that detail the creative process in the work itself

Tristram Shandy (1759), a novel by Laurence Sterne. The title character attempts to tell his life story, but is so meandering that this novel becomes more about the futility of telling one's life story.

Pale Fire (1962), a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. A fictional editor publishes and comments on a poem by the fictional poet John Shade, which takes the form of this fictional novel.

Adaptation (2002), a film directed by Spike Jonze. In this movie, a screenwriter is writing a script about a book which is too complicated to be turned into a script.

inspiration for love. An excellent illustration of this symbiotic relationship between love and inspiration is the poem "December," in which the speaker and her lover are building a snowman, and a crowd gathers around them to watch their actions.

Friendship The constant need to be alone with friends is more prevalent in her later poetry. In "I think: how stupid I have been" (1967) she is to meet friends at six o'clock in a café. Because her watch is fast, she arrives before the others. While she is waiting she enumerates their good qualities and finally comes to the conclusion that she is "afraid to be alone." Akhmadulina also seeks the company of friends when she can no longer endure the futility of trying to write. Akhmadulina's search for solace in the company of friends is a logical result of her predicament—especially since poetry and lovers often are not there when she needs them.

Influence on Other Writers As part of the "new wave" of writers, Akhmadulina is considered an important Russian poet and perhaps one of the most popular Russian woman poets of her generation. Her influence can be seen on the poets from her country who followed her literary tradition.

Works in Critical Context

Akhmadulina's distinctive poetic voice, lively style, and original use of themes have been praised by critics. They also commend her witty use of metaphor to comment on society and the natural world and her ability to create and sustain her personal perspective in her poems. In addition, her stylistic and thematic variety is held in high regard.

Fever, and Other Poems Writing of Fever, and Other Poems, Rosemary Neiswender notes that Akhmadulina's "frequent subject [is] the soul in the winter of its discontent. No socialist realist, she is preoccupied with the symbolic ague of our age ('Fever'), the spiritual dichotomy between the Russian North and Georgian South ('Longing for Lermontov'), and the martyrdoms of her great predecessors (poems to Tsvetaeva, Pushkin, Pasternak)."

Elaine Feinstein writes that "at her finest Akhmadulina combines a fierce, comic invention with her most passionate utterance: she turns her wit upon herself (as in 'Fever'), or upon the complacent materialism of the worldly (as in 'A Tale about Rain')."

Yevgeny Yevtushenko wrote in the foreword to *Fever*, *and Other Poems* that she is "endowed with an amazing poetic ear" and was recognized as "a queen of rhyme" even while in school. He criticized what he called "the poverty of content" of her earliest published work, attributing this to her mastery of form before a mature range of experience and expression had ripened. But he added: "The Rubicon is crossed and she will never betray her vow to Tsvetaeva to kill Yelabuga."

Responses to Literature

1. Akhmadulina claims she doesn't write political poems, but can you find evidence to the contrary in her earlier poems?

- 2. Track the changes in two of her favorite symbols, flowers and dogs, over the years of her poetry.
- 3. Which do you think Akhmadulina values more, love or friendship? Give evidence citing a few of her poems in *Fever*, *and Other Poems*.
- 4. Akhmadulina celebrates the Georgian countryside in many of her poems. What in particular does she seem to like about this place?
- 5. Akhmadulina owes much of her expression to Russian writers like Pasternak and Pushkin, Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva. What do these writers have in common, stylistically?

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Anna Akhmatova

BORN: 1889, Bol'shoi Fontan, Russia DIED: 1966, Domodedovo, Russia

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Poetry, prose, translation

MAJOR WORKS: Evening (1912)

Requiem: A Cycle of Poems (1964)



Anna Akhmatova Akhmatova, Anna, 1918, photograph. Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

Overview

Over the course of a poetic career of nearly sixty years, Soviet poet Anna Akhmatova (Anna Andreevna Gorenko) led a literary movement, had her work banned in her own country, survived political and social unrest, and became a symbol of creative survival against tremendous odds. Described as the "tragic queen" of Russian poetry and considered among the country's most significant poets, she remains a beautiful and sad symbol of twentieth-century upheaval.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Mentor and a Pen Name Anna Andreevna Gorenko was born in Bol'shoi Fontan in Russia on June 11, 1889, the third of six children to an aristocratic family in a wealthy suburb of St. Petersburg. After an education at girls' schools, she enrolled in the Department of Law at Kiev College in 1907, but her interest in literature and writing soon overtook her legal studies.

As a teenager, Gorenko began to write poems, receiving advice from poet Nikolai Stepanovich Gumilev, whom

she had met in 1903. Gumilev spent years courting Gorenko, and although she was not initially interested in a relationship with him, she did let him read her poetry. Subsequently, he edited her first poem, "On his hand are lots of shining rings," which appeared in a Russian magazine in 1907 under her real name. Her father objected to the publication of her poems under his name, so Gorenko took on the pen name Anna Akhmatova.

Marriage and Bohemian Life Akhmatova eventually agreed to marry Gumilev in 1910. While on honeymoon with Gumilev in Paris, Akhmatova met an artist who would influence her greatly. Amedeo Modigliani was an unknown painter at the time. He became her correspondent and friend, accompanying her during her repeat visit to Paris in 1911 and even sketching her in the nude.

While she was discovering Paris with her new friend, Akhmatova's husband was gaining recognition as the leader of a new literary movement: Acmeism. The group, whose name came from the Greek word *acme* (pinnacle), opposed Symbolism, a literary movement characterized by a belief in mysticism, and metaphorical language. Instead of dealing with the mysteries of the "divine world," Acmeists focused on the material, or visible, world. The Acmeists (who included Gumilev, Sergei Mitrofanovich Gorodetsky, Mandel'shtam, Vladimir Ivanovich Narbut, Mikhail Aleksandrovich Zenkevich, and eventually Akhmatova) preferred to express themselves directly through images instead of symbols. Though Gumilev did not take Akhmatova's poetry seriously at first, he eventually found that her verse fit well with Acmeist principles.

The years 1911–1912 were productive for Akhmatova in more ways than one: 1911 brought the publication of more of her poems in Russian magazines; her collection *Evening* (1912) was published, which brought her immediate fame; and she gave birth to her only son, Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev, on September 18, 1912. Not ready to give up her bohemian lifestyle, Akhmatova left her son with her mother-in-law and returned to St. Petersburg.

By 1914, Akhmatova had become a leading figure in St. Petersburg's literary circle. Known for her great beauty and charisma, she charmed and attracted several admirers and built up a beautiful but sad persona that enchanted the city. Along with other literary figures, she read her poetry at the Stray Dog cabaret, a smoky basement where she could show off her beautiful figure and her free-wheeling charm. She was to meet several lovers there, including composer Artur Sergeevich Lur'e and poet Vladimir Kazimirovich Shileiko, who would later become her second husband. Though she showed no outward sign of regret for her affairs or her abandonment of her son, Akhmatova's early bohemian poems deal with themes of guilt, sin, and repentance.

War and Revolution But Akhmatova and her friends could not ignore the changes that were taking place in Russian society. World War I came to Russia,

and with it the closure of the Stray Dog, which had become a symbol of the free and fun prewar years. Akhmatova turned her poetic attentions from love to politics as she foreshadowed hard times to come. After the 1917 Revolution, in which the Bolsheviks seized control of the Russian government in an effort to improve workers' rights, many of Akhmatova's friends fled Russia and advised her to come along. However, Akhmatova stayed in Russia, divorcing her husband, marrying Shileiko, and moving to the Sheremet'ev ("Fountain House") Palace. Akhmatova's residence at the Fountain House carried on a long literary tradition of housing poets and authors there, including influential nineteenth-century figures such as Sergeevich Pushkin and Petr Andreevich Viazemsky.

Though the Revolution threatened the political future of Russia, it created a temporary period of creative freedom for Russia's artists and poets. Energized, Akhmatova wrote new poetry that focused on her commitment to her Russian homeland and her refusal to emigrate along with her friends. But Akhmatova had made a real sacrifice by staying in Russia after the Revolution. She lived in an unheated apartment with Shileiko, who by now had become distant and unhappy with Akhmatova, and began to lament the prerevolutionary days. Her ex-husband, Gumilev, was a direct casualty of the new regime: an anti-Communist, he was arrested and executed for his "monarchist" views in 1920.

Banned Akhmatova, whose poetry lived in a past she could not recapture, found herself in opposition to the Bolshevik regime. Critics began to describe her work as "anachronistic," and her traditional approach to poetry was endangered when her work was banned by the government in 1925. Akhmatova had never made a living doing anything but writing and found herself without an income. However, she was embraced by the literary community, who continued to admire her work and supported her through hard financial times. Akhmatova's admirers commissioned her to translate poetry and write works of literary scholarship, including a series of important essays on Pushkin.

Akhmatova divorced Shileiko in 1926 and moved in with Nikolai Nikolaevich Punin, a poet and avant-garde art historian she first met in 1914. Though she never married Punin, she considered him to be her third husband and lived with his family in the Fountain House, the same palace where she had lived at the beginning of her failed marriage with Shileiko. Over the course of her time in the palace, she would live with Punin's family members in cramped and shabby quarters that symbolized Russia's increasingly cramped and noisy communal life.

Requiem Life in Leningrad (formerly St. Petersburg) wasn't just cramped—it was plagued with uncertainty and fear. Akhmatova faced arrest and interrogation for her writing, which had to be done in secret. However, she found a way to keep working. While composing

Requiem: A Cycle of Poems (1964), her long narrative poem, she whispered the words line by line to her friends, who memorized them before she burned the paper on which they had been composed. This protected her and her friends, who passed the long poem to one another under threat of search and arrest.

Akhmatova wrote the bitter, tragic *Requiem* in response to her son's imprisonment. Now a historian, her son spent over twenty years in forced labor camps because of his father and mother's "counterrevolutionary" activities. Moved by the collective experience of torture and murder during the Soviet purges, Akhmatova used folk songs and traditional Russian imagery to express the breakdown of self and society.

The government finally gave Akhmatova permission to publish a new volume of poems in 1940. Akhmatova regained her place in the public consciousness during the terrifying siege of Leningrad, in which German troops attempted to starve the city out, leading to the deaths of 1.5 million civilians. During this time, Akhmatova and other intellectuals participated in a series of radio broadcasts devoted to the arts. Even after her evacuation to Uzbekistan in late 1941, Akhmatova's poems found an audience in Russia, and she became a symbol of Russian patriotism, the culture of the past, and the tragedy of war.

Tragedy and Sacrifice Life seemed to be improving for Akhmatova with her return to Leningrad and the end of World War II. She was allowed to publish Izbrannoe (Selected Poems) and her son was released from prison. However, she had to break off her engagement to Vladimir Georgievich Garshin, a doctor she had met before the war, when she got in trouble with the government once again, this time over her 1946 visits with influential exiled philosopher Isaiah Berlin. Andrei Zhdanov, who was in charge of cultural policy in Josef Stalin's government, criticized her work and called her "half whore, half nun." Akhmatova's work was immediately rebanned and destroyed, and she was expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers. This amounted to a death sentence by starvation, since only union members could get food ration cards. As a final blow, her son was rearrested and sent back to prison in 1949.

Encouraged by her friends to cooperate with the government, Akhmatova decided to trade her literary reputation for her son's freedom. She wrote twelve patriotic poems praising Stalinism, advocating Communism, and celebrating her "happy life" in the Soviet Union. However, even Stalin was not convinced by this desperate attempt, and her sacrifice was in vain. These insincere poems may have compromised her reputation, but they did not free her son.

Devastated, Akhmatova threw herself into work on her masterpiece, *Poem without a Hero* (1960). A long narrative poem that acts as a funeral lament, *Poem without a Hero* explores the past, exposing Russia's collective guilt. Complex in structure and filled with complicated

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Akhmatova's famous contemporaries include:

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953): Soviet dictator who led one of the most repressive regimes in modern history.

Dorothy Parker (1893–1967): Jazz-Age writer and poet known for her witty remarks on American urban life.

Boris Pasternak (1890–1960): Russian poet and writer who was forbidden to publish his poems and novels within Russia.

Alexandra Fyodorovna (1872–1918): Last Tsaritsa of the Russian Empire; died under mysterious circumstances after the Russian Revolution.

Robert Frost (1872–1963): American poet known for his poetry about rural New England.

allusions and references, the poem still fascinates modern critics.

Akhmatova lived to experience a "thaw" in Soviet politics after Stalin's death in 1953. Though her work was still censored, she was allowed to publish throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and her son was released from prison in 1956. She acted as a patroness to young poets, including Joseph Brodsky, during this time, and was allowed to leave the country in 1965 to accept literary prizes abroad. Though she gained recognition by the Russian government as one of the most important Russian poets, she never saw *Requiem* published in Russia during her lifetime. She died on March 5, 1966, after suffering a heart attack.

Works in Literary Context

Akhmatova was influenced by Russian writers such as Sergeevich Pushkin and Boris Pasternak and by artists in other media, such as Amedeo Modigliani. However, it can be argued that the turbulent events of her lifetime were the biggest influence on her tragic and bitter body of work.

Prerevolutionary Russia Akhmatova's work often refers to the prerevolutionary Russia of her childhood. This Russia is characterized by carefree manners and dignified traditions. In poems like "Midnight Verses," she fondly recalls the artistic, genteel society of her youth. Akhmatova also uses the Russia of the past as a contrast to modern violence in her masterpieces, *Requiem* and *Poem without a Hero*.

Women and Love Akhmatova's poems were all written from a distinctly female perspective, showing the many moods of a woman. Her exploration of love and femininity occurred primarily in her early work, which

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Imprisonment, exile, and government repression are common themes in Anna Akhmatova's poems. Here are a few works of other authors that reflect similar themes:

The Ballad of Reading Gaol (1897), by Oscar Wilde, was written after Wilde's time served in a British jail for homosexuality.

Life Is Beautiful (1997), a film directed by Roberto Benigni, follows the imprisonment of an Italian Jew and his son during the Holocaust of World War II.

Children of Men (2006), a film directed by Alfonso Cuarón, deals with a repressive world in which humans are no longer able to reproduce.

draws upon the sights and sounds of avant-garde St. Petersburg to explore the idea of unrequited love and feminine guilt.

The Urban Environment Akhmatova's poetry is primarily concerned with urban subjects, exploring at length her fondness of the St. Petersburg of the past and her hatred of the Stalinist Leningrad. Her focus on urban life fit in well with the Acmeist movement, which preferred to explore urban themes instead of complex metaphors about nature and divinity.

Exiled and Oppressed Contemporaries Akhmatova was not alone in facing repression and threats from the Stalinist government. In fact, Soviet Russia's strict laws forced many of the country's best writers either into exile or "underground." Akhmatova's own work was passed along by memory and the original manuscripts burned. This places her alongside other Russian writers such as Boris Pasternak, whose masterpiece, Dr. Zhivago, had to be smuggled abroad to find publication; Vladimir Nabokov, who wrote his greatest works in exile; and Marina Tsvetaeva, who was unable to publish work in Russia after her return from exile.

Patronage and Literary Influence Later in life, Akhmatova acted as a patroness to younger poets like Joseph Brodsky. The young poets who visited her at her dacha in Komoravo during the last years of her life continued her literary heritage and worked to have her poems published abroad. In addition, Akhmatova corresponded and visited with literary figures abroad such as Robert Frost.

Works in Critical Context

Akhmatova's central position in Russian poetry was acknowledged throughout her career, earning her nicknames such as "Queen of the Neva" and "Soul of the

Silver Age." However, her critical reception varied. Though her first collection of poetry brought her fame and good reviews, her move into more serious poetry dealing with Russian patriotism and the past earned her criticism for "living in the past" and failing to praise the new Soviet government. As a result, her work was banned in Russia. However, these critics were motivated by political reasons, and it is hard to piece together an accurate view of her works' critical reception during her lifetime. Akhmatova did live to see critical success and recognition during her lifetime; in a 1965 essay, professor Ihor Levitsky stated, "She is a master craftsman whose art consists in infallibly joining together words in such as way as to insure their greatest possible emotional impact on the reader." He adds, "Her verse is the direct expression, the very substance of emotion, not just a metaphoric rendering of it." In more modern times, Akhmatova has taken a place at the forefront of Russian poetry alongside writers like Pushkin and Brodsky. Michael Klimenko summed up the power and passion of her work when he remarked, "everything she wrote bears the stamp of finely-chiseled, most intimate, aesthetic and emotional experience."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Akhmatova was not allowed to publish through much of her lifetime because her poetry and lifestyle stood in opposition to the Soviet government. Are there circumstances when this kind of censorship might be justified? What about in times of war? Are there any limitations a government is justified in imposing on writers when it is threatened externally or internally by its own citizens?
- 2. A number of American and European writers and artists became Communists or were sympathetic to the Soviet Union during the 1930s and 1940s. Given the repression Akhmatova and her comrades faced, how can you account for this? What ideas or circumstances made Communism an attractive ideology to Western writers and artists?
- 3. During World War II and the Siege of Leningrad, Akhmatova became a symbol of Russian courage and patriotism. What other historic, nonmilitary figures have come to symbolize their countries during wartime or times of national stress?
- 4. Censorship and government repression affected the fate of Akhmatova's poetry within her own country. What other literary figures have been affected by censorship and repression? Using the library and the Internet, write a paper on two or three literary figures who wrote while imprisoned for their personal beliefs or in exile from their country.
- 5. Hoping to save her son from a second term of imprisonment, Akhmatova chose to publish pro-Stalin poetry. Do you think this compromised

- Akhmatova's literary integrity? Why or why not? Write a personal narrative about a time you felt pressured to make a choice between compromising your values and helping someone else.
- 6. Among the poets Akhmatova mentored was Joseph Brodsky. Brodsky was exiled from the Soviet Union and spent the last part of his life in the United States, where for a time he served as Poet Laureate. Using the library or the Internet, research Brodsky's career in the United States and write a profile of him and his importance to American poetry.

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Claribel Alegría

BORN: 1924, Estelí, Nicaragua NATIONALITY: Nicaraguan GENRE: Poems, novels

MAJOR WORKS: Ring of Silence (1948) The Talisman (1977) I Survive (1978)

Nicaragua: The Sandinista Revolution—a Political Chronicle, 1855–1979 (1982) They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadoran Women in Struggle for National Liberation (1983)



Claribel Alegría Alegria, Claribel, photograph. AP / Wide World Photos. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

Poet and novelist Claribel Alegría is a major voice in the struggle for social change and freedom in Latin America. An outspoken advocate for women in her native Nicaragua and in El Salvador, Alegría addresses the challenges faced by Central Americans through both poetry and "emergency letters." Exiled from Nicaragua as a child, her own dramatic life forms a backdrop for her narratives and poems, which focus on poverty, civil rights, and justice for women.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in Exile Alegría's struggle for civil rights began in her own childhood. Born on May 12, 1924, as Clara Isabel Alegría Vides in Estelí, Nicaragua, she moved to El Salvador along with her parents when her father, Daniel Alegría, was exiled for his political views on the American occupation of Nicaragua and his support of revolutionary forces. The family moved to El Salvador, the homeland of Ana María Vides, Alegría's mother. Vides belonged to a wealthy coffee family and had grown up in a privileged environment. When Alegría was only seven

years old, she and her family witnessed the horrors of the peasant uprising known as *La matanza* or "The massacre," in which thousands of lower-class Salvadorans and indigenous Pipil Indians fought back against a military seizure of the government which was supported by United States aid. After the rebellion was quashed, the remaining rebels were invited by the government to a mass pardon that proved instead to be an ambush; anywhere from ten thousand to forty thousand citizens were killed by government forces. This event greatly influenced Alegría's views on Latin American politics and United States influence in Latin America, as shown in her later work.

An American Education Alegría had access to a large library and began to explore writing early in her life. After reading poets like Santa Teresa d'Avila and Rómulo Gallegos, Alegría decided she, too, wanted to write poetry. She was further inspired by Rainer Maria Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet, which convinced her that her passion was in the written word. However, this career choice stood in opposition to what was expected of an elite Salvadoran girl, so she went to the United States to study at the George Washington University in 1943. As a student, she met her mentor, the Spanish poet and Nobel Prize winner Juan Ramón Jiménez, who taught Alegría discipline and oversaw her early work. His open criticisms were sometimes hard to bear, but he pushed Alegría to produce work she could be proud of.

During her time in Washington, Alegría met Darwin Flakoll. Their marriage in 1947 began a lifelong partnership that would include writing, family bonds, and residence in six countries. The expatriates met and collaborated with several writers and poets, but Alegría had her own aspirations. *Ring of Silence (Anillo de silencio)* (1948), Alegría's first book of poetry, was published in 1948. José Vasconcelos, a Mexican poet and philosopher who wrote the book's prologue, suggested that Alegría adopt the pen name of Claribel Alegría.

With a new name and a new husband to support her, Alegría embarked on a literary career that included narrative fiction (*Three Stories*, originally titled *Tres Cuentos*, 1958;) and a family career that included four children (Maya was born in 1949, followed by twins Patricia and Karen in 1950, and Erik in 1954). Flakoll was in the U.S. Foreign Service, which meant he had to move often: the family would live in Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and Paris over the course of the next several years.

Cuban Revolution and Remembering the Past The year 1959 marked a major milestone in Alegría's life and career when the Cuban Revolution sparked a new interest in Latin American politics. Inspired by the Cubans' rejection of United States interference and impressed by the political and social change that followed, Alegría felt a new hope for Central America's future. Her poetry became political, taking on topics such as the economic situation of Latin American women. She

also began to identify with the growing community of Latin American writers inspired by events in Cuba.

During her time in Paris between 1962 and 1966, Alegría became increasingly obsessed with Latin American politics and literature. Her friend, Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, encouraged her to write a novel based on her memories of the 1932 peasant uprising in El Salvador. The events behind the novel were hard for Alegría to relive, and she decided to write the book along with her husband in their first fictional collaboration. *Ashes of Izalco* (*Cenizas de Izalco*) was published in 1966 to critical acclaim.

The book, which is one of the first by a Salvadoran writer to face the country's violent past of peasant uprisings and government brutality, dealt with themes of mothers and daughters, the lazy and insensitive elite class, political repression, and foreign intervention that would echo throughout Alegría's later work. While researching the book, Alegría was surprised to find that the Salvadoran government had destroyed many newspapers and archives containing information about its bloody past. Not only did she relive her childhood memories when writing the book, but she was horrified to find that the past was being misrepresented in her adoptive country.

Alegría's family did not like the portrayal of elite life as shallow, and they burned almost every single copy of the first edition. As a consequence, *Ashes of Izalco* was not widely read in El Salvador until ten years later, when the Salvadoran government accidentally included it in a print run of Salvadoran authors.

A Focus on Social Issues Alegría did not shy away from strong and violent themes in the work that followed. While living in Majorca, Spain, she published several volumes of poetry and The Talisman (El detén), a 1977 novella dealing with violent sexual abuse. The subject matter of this book reflects Alegría's growing concern with women's issues, pointing to a new era of Salvadoran fiction that was less focused on technique and experimentation and more focused on social issues of the day.

Social issues would continue to obsess Alegría, who won the prestigious Casa de las Americas Prize for *I Survive* (*Sobrevivo*), a volume of poetry she published in 1978. *I Survive* dealt with political and social issues in her homeland, with Alegría acting as a witness and a voice for the oppressed in her poems about torture, imperialism, and human suffering.

Return to Nicaragua In 1979, the Sandinista rebels gained power in Nicaragua. Alegría returned to her home country for the first time since she was a baby. Delighted at the end of her political and personal exile, Alegría set out to document the Sandinista revolution through Nicaragua: The Sandinista Revolution—a Political Chronicle, 1855–1979 (Nicaragua: La revolución sandinista—una crónica política, 1855–1979) (1982). The book was a five-hundred page collection of testimony and history and represented another collaboration between Alegría

and Flakoll, who spent six months traveling through Nicaragua and even longer writing the book.

While she was in Paris writing the book in 1980, another milestone occurred. Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated in El Salvador. Alegría had been scheduled to do a reading at the Sorbonne, but at her husband's encouragement she spoke out against Romero's assassination and the existence of death squads in El Salvador. Her words made it dangerous for her to return to El Salvador, and she was even advised to avoid the country when her mother died in 1982.

Now in unofficial exile from her adoptive country, Alegría would become more interested in the idea of testimony throughout the 1980s. Not content to write specific stories, she preferred to document the struggle of an entire group of oppressed people, such as Salvadoran girls and political prisoners. She collaborated with her husband on two such books: They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadoran Women in Struggle for National Liberation (No me agarran viva: La mujer salvadoreña en lucha, 1983) and Breaking the Silence: Resistance and Struggle in Salvadoran Prisons (Para romper el silencio: Resistencia y lucha en las cárceles salvadoreñas, 1984).

Though she has been exiled from two countries, shunned by her own family, and devastated by personal losses, Alegría's body of work has survived along with its author. As more of her novels and poetry become available in translation, Alegría is finally enjoying international renown and critical acclaim. Alegría continues to speak out against oppressive social regimes and violence against women, and her list of publications continues to grow.

Works in Literary Context

As a child, Alegría was inspired by Rainer Maria Rilke, poets of the Spanish Golden Age such as Santa Teresa d'Avila and San Juan de la Cruz, and Latin American writers including Rómulo Gallegos and Gabriela Mistral. During her lifetime, Alegría edited and collaborated with a number of significant Latin American writers and poets, among them Juan Ramón Jiménez, Carlos Martinez Morelo, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, and Julio Cortázar.

Imperialism and Occupation Alegría saw the effects of U.S. imperialism and occupation during her own lifetime and was an outspoken critic of foreign manipulation of Latin American politics in her poetry and prose. As a rebellion against what she saw as foreign occupation of her native lands, Alegría often used native myths and early Central American history as part of her narrative structure in books like Ashes of Izalco.

Social Justice For Alegría, a commitment to social justice is a writer's duty. Alegría believes that writers must take sides. To illustrate that point, she has come down firmly on the side of Central America's oppressed and tortured citizens, from Salvadoran women in They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadoran Women in Struggle for

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Alegría's famous contemporaries include:

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Colombian novelist, political activist, and Nobel Prize winner known for his magical realism.

Jean Rhys (1890–1979): Caribbean novelist who rethought traditional literature with her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).

Fidel Castro (1926–): President of Cuba until 2008 and central figure of the Cuban Revolution.

Toni Morrison (1931–): American author famous for her epic novels about the African American experience.

Maria Callas (1923–1977): Famous Greek-American operatic soprano known for her dramatic interpretations.

National Liberation to political prisoners in Breaking the Silence: Resistance and Struggle in Salvadoran Prisons. Alegría has described her poetry and prose after 1965 as letras de emergencia ("emergency letters"), impassioned works that touch on political and social strife in her home region.

Women and Feminism Alegría has always identified as a feminist writer, and much of her work concerns the plight of Latin American women. In books like Ashes of Izalco, she uses mother-daughter relationships to illustrate the conflicts of Latin American society. Alegría's portraits of women are examples of the ways in which Latin American society restricts women's freedoms and rights; for example, Ashes of Izalco deals with a woman who must come to terms with the social restraints that have affected her mother and herself. Alegría has also addressed issues like sexual abuse in El detén and continues to speak out against anti-woman policies in South and Central America.

Works in Critical Context

Though Alegría has had a lengthy and distinguished career, her work has been little known outside of Latin America. However, an increasing number of translations and renewed interest in Latin American writers points to a new age in criticism of Alegría's work.

Critics have taken note of Alegría's use of testimony and her attempts to give voice to those who have no political means of expression. Teresa Longo calls Alegría's writing "a poetic reconstruction of places torn apart by injustice and repression," noting that Alegría writes in a dual role as writer and activist. English-speaking critics also paid major critical attention to Saudade/Sorrow, hailing it as sad, but "neither sentimental nor confessional."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Part of Alegría's mission as a writer is to awaken readers to political and social injustice in the world and inspire actions with her stories and poems. Here are a few works that have produced similar effects:

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe is a political novel that influenced American attitudes toward slavery and is thought by many to have helped bring on the Civil War.

Born into Brothels: Calcutta's Red Light Kids (2004), a film directed by Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman, is a documentary about prostitutes' children living in the red light district of Calcutta, India.

The Country Between Us (1982) by Carolyn Forche is a book of poetry that centers on human rights issues during the civil war in El Salvador. Forche was able to travel to El Salvador as a human rights worker after translating Alegría's work and winning a Guggenheim Fellowship. The book includes the prose poem "The Colonel."

An Inconvenient Truth (2006), a documentary film presented by former vice president Al Gore and directed by Davis Guggenheim, deals with the coming effects of global warming.

As more of Alegría's work is translated and brought to the attention of the Western world, the critical land-scape will grow and evolve. Until then, Alegría will remain part of the first generation of Latin American writers to challenge their governments and re-create their history through words.

Responses to Literature

- Alegría's works use the mother-daughter relationship to answer important questions about society, culture, and feminism. Can you think of three Western novels or films that deal with similar questions through their female protagonists?
- 2. Alegría was influenced by the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the social changes in Cuba that followed. Yet soon after, Cuban president Fidel Castro turned Cuba into a Stalinist dictatorship and imprisoned writers who dissented against his regime. How does this affect your reading of Alegría's works? Are her passionate cries against violent human rights abuses in Latin America compromised when she overlooks the repression of Communist regimes?
- 3. Alegría is a feminist who also writes about historic economic injustices in Latin America. Are the two concerns ever contradictory? Examine the sexual

- politics in Alegría's works and see whether she ties together economic injustice and sexual politics or whether she separates the two themes.
- 4. Alegría and her husband, Darwin Flakoll, shared a great artistic tradition of collaboration between a husband and wife. Using your library and the Internet, write an essay on another couple who collaborated together on a film, piece of music, or work of fiction.
- 5. Alegría believes that writers should take sides and never be neutral. Do you agree? Why or why not? Should a writer be an observer or an active participant in history? Write a paper that reflects your personal opinions about a writer's role in society.

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図 Vicente Aleixandre

BORN: 1898, Seville, Spain DIED: 1984, Madrid, Spain NATIONALITY: Spanish

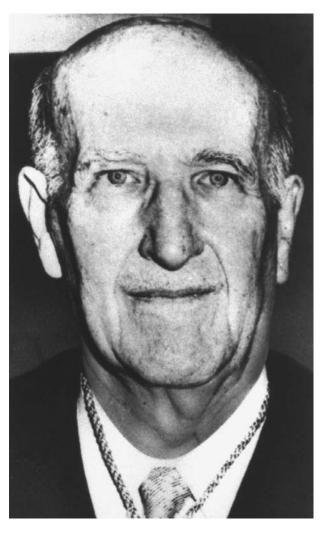
GENRE: *Poetry*MAJOR WORKS:

Ambito (1928) Destruction or Love (1935)

Shadow of Paradise (1944)

Overview

Vicente Aleixandre is recognized by critics and by the newer generation of Spanish poets as an influential voice. He was awarded the 1977 Nobel Prize for Literature for "a creative poetic writing which illuminates man's condition in the cosmos and in present-day society, at the same time



Aleixandre Vicente Aleixandre, Vicente, 1975, photograph. AP Images.

representing the great renewal of the traditions of Spanish poetry between the wars," as the citation read. At the time of the awarding of the Nobel Prize, however, Aleixandre's name was little known outside Spanish literary circles.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Vicente Aleixandre Merlo was born in Seville, Spain, on April 26, 1898, to Cirilo and Elvira Merlo Aleixandre. When he was eleven, his family moved to Madrid, Spain, where he later received degrees in law and business administration. In 1919, after graduating from the university, he began to teach at the School of Business. For a while he devoted himself to his profession and wrote on economic subjects. He never married or had children.

Focused on Poetry Amidst Life-Long Illness In 1925, Aleixandre contracted tuberculosis, beginning a series of illnesses that plagued him for the rest of his life. His health eventually forced him to abandon his career,

and he began to concentrate on writing poetry. In 1926, a few of his friends sent some of his poems to a literary journal. They were published that same year, and his first book of poems, *Ambito*, came out in 1928.

Around the same time, Aleixandre began to associate with Pedro Salinas, Federico García Lorca, Jorge Guillén, and other poets based in Madrid. This association developed into the innovative literary movement referred to as the Generation of 1927. Writers in this group reacted against what they saw as the provincialism of Spanish literature. They advocated poetry as a means of discovering and exploring the relationship between external reality and the poet's internal world, and, while they rejected sentimentality, love was a dominant theme.

Created Poetry in a Tumultuous Atmosphere It was during this time Aleixandre created his major work of surrealist poetry, Earth Passion. Unfortunately for the poet, in the late 1920s Spain was on the verge of tremendous upheaval and civil war that would overshadow his literary achievement. The Spanish king abdicated in favor of a republic. The republic lasted for five years, but Spain remained split by conflict in every part of society. In July 1936, a military uprising threw the country into a civil war that lasted for three years. While Nationalist leader General Francisco Franco had enough control to establish a military dictatorship in October 1936, the fighting between the Republicans and the Nationalists continued and proved brutal. Many of the world's leading intellectuals and artists sympathized with the Republicans and volunteered for service with them, but despite their efforts, Franco was victorious. He was Spain's military dictator for forty years.

Although *Earth Passion* was finished in 1929, it remained practically unknown until 1946, by which time Aleixandre was established as the most representative member of his generation still living in Spain. Many members of Spain's artistic community left the country when the civil war began or shortly thereafter. Only a few copies of the 1935 Mexican first edition reached Spain before the civil war, and consequently, in spite of its revolutionary nature, the book did not have any noticeable influence on the literary developments of the period it represents so well. Had it been published immediately after Aleixandre finished writing it, *Earth Passion* would likely have become one of the major surrealist books in Spanish literature.

Civil War Affects Output During the three years of the civil war, Aleixandre wrote sparingly, although he contributed war poems to some publications that supported the government. By the end of the war, Federico García Lorca was dead. Luis Cernuda, Guillén, Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, and many other poets and writers had left Spain. Unlike other surviving poets of the generation, however, Aleixandre did not leave Spain after the war. He lived, during Franco's time in power, the interior exile of an intellectual who was opposed to the reigning political dictatorship. His works were banned in the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aleixandre's famous contemporaries include:

Salvador Dali (1904–1989): Spanish surrealist artist and filmmaker; well-known for his painting *The Persistence of Memory*.

Francisco Franco (1892–1975): authoritarian leader of Spain from 1939 to 1975; pursued a policy of neutrality during World War II, although he helped Nazi Germany in its fight against the Soviet Union.

Jorge Guillén (1893–1984): Spanish poet and one of the Generation of 1927; lived in exile in the United States after 1938.

Federico García Lorca (1898–1936): Spanish poet and playwright. One of the Generation of 1927, García Lorca was murdered during the Spanish Civil War, his body dumped into an unmarked grave. His work was banned in Spain by Franco's regime until 1953.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Chilean poet and Communist politician; awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971.

postwar years due to his antifascist beliefs and his independence from the official regime.

Postwar Poems Look Outward Shadow of Paradise (1944; English translation, 1987), Aleixandre's first collection following the civil war, is a transitional volume leading to the second phase of his career. Although poems in the middle period, which include those from The Heart's History (1954) and In a Vast Domain (1962), share with earlier ones a nostalgia for the lost union between humanity and nature, a dramatic shift in focus is evident.

Whereas previously Aleixandre had looked inside the individual, rejecting historical and social reality, he now reached outward, emphasizing connections between the self and the surrounding world and projecting a universal compassion for humanity with these volumes. Surreal imagery and irrationalist techniques gave way to a simpler, more direct approach in which the affirmation of love clearly predominates.

Emphasized Theory and Contemplation Some of Aleixandre's most important theoretical texts are from the 1950s and include Some Characteristics of the New Spanish Poetry (1955) and the notes to the anthology Mis poemas mejores. His point of view on poetics became a guiding principle among Spanish poets.

Toward the end of the 1960s, Aleixandre abandoned most of the elements that characterize his realistic work. A more meditative attitude set the tone of his later poems.

Returned to Poetic Roots Aleixandre's final period, which produced Poems of Consummation (1968) and Dialogues of Knowledge (1974), is characterized by a return to the structural and metaphysical complexity of his early work. By this time, Spanish society was undergoing another transition, as Franco died in 1975, and Spain temporarily returned to monarchy. King Juan Carlos I wanted his country to become a democracy, and by 1977, Spain had its first democratic parliamentary elections.

When Aleixandre received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1977, ill health prevented him from attending the ceremony, and the award had little effect on his life. The initial media exposure did not lead to increased critical attention, particularly outside Spain, and he did not write much more. He died of kidney failure and shock from intestinal hemorrhage on December 14, 1984, in Madrid, Spain.

Works in Literary Context

Vicente Aleixandre's poetry evolved in line with the main transformations in Spanish lyric poetry. He had a clear understanding of the historical character of all artistic creation, and his own writing reflects his recognition of what was essential in the main currents of Spanish poetic art at different historical moments.

Surrealism and Organic Descriptions Surrealism, which began in France in the 1920s, can be defined as the principles, ideals, or practice of producing fantastic or surprising imagery in art or literature by means of unnatural combinations. The surrealists tried to combine unconscious and conscious experiences, in a reaction against complete rationalism. Aleixandre frequently relied on surreal imagery in his poetry, even in later years when the surrealist movement had waned. Much of the imagery he used was based on nature and organic objects, revealing his respect for and love of nature and the idea that humankind was cutting itself off from its unity with the natural and spiritual world, to its own detriment.

A Wide Swath of Spanish History Aleixandre's life covered a period of Spanish literary history that extends from the masterly Generation of 1898 to the developments of the 1980s, including a period of poetry similar to the politicized social poetry preferred in Spain in the 1950s and 1960s. As a young man, he was involved in a group of poets including—besides García Lorca and Neruda—Luis Cernuda, Pedro Salinas, Rafael Alberti, and Miguel Hernández.

As a mature writer, Aleixandre was a mentor and guide to the younger generations searching for a poetic inheritance after the civil war. The younger generation saw in Aleixandre a connecting link with the older, precivil war poets who had died or were living in exile. He was seen as a model by those who began to write during the first years of dictatorship: he represented the continuity of literary excellence in postwar Spain.

Works in Critical Context

While Aleixandre had been popular with critics in Spain for many years, his Nobel Prize brought his work to the attention of a wider critical audience. His poems are regarded as structurally complex and carefully crafted, perhaps too hard for a general audience to fully appreciate. Critics acknowledged, however, that Aleixandre played a vital role in the evolution of Spanish-language poetry.

Importance of the Subconscious Many critics, and Aleixandre himself, have noted Sigmund Freud's influence on his exploration of the hidden passions and driving forces that operate beneath the surface of the mind. Lewis Hyde, one of Aleixandre's noted translators, observed that a desire to explore "the strong undertow beneath the accelerating tide of rationalism" connects Freud, surrealism, and Aleixandre's early poetry. Of Aleixandre's poems Hyde says: "[They] are not an affirmation. They are not working out of a full and nourishing surreality, but away from the reality at hand. That...is part of their tension—they are the reflective mind trying to think its way out of coherence and precision."

Later Works Deemed Significant Carlos Bousono, the foremost scholar of Aleixandre's work, considers *Poems of Consummation* and *Dialogues of Knowledge* "possibly the two most intense books of a life rich in masterpieces." Of the latter volume, Bousono states, "Aleixandre inaugurates in [Dialogues of Knowledge] a poetry of deaf and majestic slowness, spoken in the lowest chords, which I believe to be without precedent in our literature."

The analysis and evaluation of Aleixandre's contribution to Spanish and universal literature is an ongoing process; as critical readings enhance with time the quality of his art, Aleixandre's poetry is becoming an essential component of Spanish culture.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Surrealism tries to integrate the conscious experience with the unconscious. Surrealist works are often described as "dreamlike." Do you agree with this description? Why or why not? Compare examples of Aleixandre's descriptions with some examples from your own dreams, if possible.
- 2. Aleixandre was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, but he is still not a very familiar name to English-speaking readers. Do you think learning a language besides English should be required in American schools? Even if English is a common language for international business, do Americans miss out on other cultures by not being familiar with other languages?
- 3. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research Nadine Gordimer, the South African writer who refused to leave her country during a regime she was opposed to. Write an essay comparing and con-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Aleixandre was famous for his use of surrealistic imagery in his poems. Here are some other surrealist works:

Alphaville (1965), directed by Jean-Luc Goddard. This movie, based on poems by the French surrealist Paul Éluard, combines science fiction and the style of 1940s Hollywood crime movies in its story of a secret agent in a futuristic dictatorship.

The Collected Poems (2002), by Federico García Lorca.
This Spanish-English bilingual edition includes newly
discovered works, as well as revised translations of wellknown poems.

Haunted House (1930), by Pierre Reverdy. One of André Breton's favorite books, this long prose poem is now available in a 2007 English translation by the well-known poet John Ashbery.

Selected Poems of René Char (1992), by René Char. This bilingual volume includes English translations of the French surrealist's work by nineteen poets and writers, ranging from William Carlos Williams to James Wright. The Surrealist Manifesto (1924), by André Breton. This work by the French poet, one of surrealism's founders, outlines and defines surrealism, clearly stating that it should belong to everyone, not just artists.

trasting Gordimer's and Aleixandre's reasons for staying in their countries and the reaction they received.

4. Aleixandre was a lawyer and economist before he became a poet. Read the article "The Remnants of a Lost & Forgotten Library: On Finding the Lawyer Poets" by James R. Elkins at http://tarlton.law. utexas.edu/lpop/etext/lsf/30-1-2/elkins.html, and write an essay responding to what Elkins says.

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■ Isabel Allende

BORN: 1942, Lima, Peru

NATIONALITY: Chilean; Peruvian GENRE: Novels, short stories, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The House of the Spirits (1982) Of Love and Shadows (1984) Daughter of Fortune (1999) Inés of My Soul (2006)

Overview

Chilean writer Isabel Allende is valued not only as a commentator on the turbulent nature of Latin American society but also as an author of powerful, humanistic fiction. Some scholars have even placed her among the ranks of those South American writers—Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, among others—who rose to prominence during the 1960s surge of interest in Latin American literature. As Alexander Coleman has asserted, "Allende is the first woman to join what has heretofore been an exclusive male club of Latin American novelists. Not that she is the first contemporary female writer from Latin America... but she is the first woman to approach on the same scale as the others the tormented patriarchal world of traditional Hispanic society."



Isabel Allende Allende, Isabel, photograph. AP Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up in Turbulent Times Allende was born in Lima, Peru, where her father served as a diplomatic representative of Chile. Although Allende's contact with her father ceased following her parents' divorce, she remained close to his family—particularly Salvador Allende, her godfather and her father's cousin, who served as president of Chile from 1970 to 1973. As a child in Santiago, Chile, Allende lived with her maternal grandparents, who would later serve as models for Esteban and Clara Trueba, the patriarch and matriarch of the family whose history Allende chronicled in her first and best-known novel, The House of the Spirits (La casa de los espíritus) (1982). After spending her adolescence in Bolivia, Europe, and the Middle East with her mother and diplomat stepfather, Allende settled in Chile and became a journalist. Her life changed abruptly in 1973 when a military coup, led by General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, resulted in the assassination of Salvador Allende and the overthrow of his socialist government. While she remained in Chile for several months following the takeover, Allende's efforts to assist the opposition of the new regime ultimately jeopardized her safety. As Allende said in a Publishers Weekly interview quoted in Contemporary Authors, "I realized that everything was possible—that violence was a dimension that was always around you."

Allende and her family fled Chile for Venezuela, where she wrote for the newspaper *El Nacional*. Less work came her way than in her native country, and she found herself with a lot of time for thought. She used it to take stock of her own life and of the history of her own culture. One of the fruits of her reflections was a long and ultimately unmailed letter she wrote to her ailing grandfather in Chile, chronicling the long and complicated history of her own family. That letter, fictionalized and heavily elaborated, grew into Allende's first novel, *The House of the Spirits*.

Coming to America The House of the Spirits was translated into English in 1985 and began to gain wide attention in the United States; translated into other languages as well, it became a best seller in several European countries. Allende won several new-author awards and was brought to the United States for a promotional tour as Of Love and Shadows (De amor y de sombra, 1984), her second novel set in Chile during the dictatorship of Pinochet, was released. After giving a reading in San Jose, California, Allende met a U.S. lawyer, William Gordon; the two later married, and Allende continues to make her home in northern California.

After a decade of novels that received a lukewarm reception, Allende returned to the epic sweep of her debut in the late 1990s. Her novels *Daughter of Fortune* (*Hija de la fortuna*, 1999) and *Portrait in Sepia* (*Retrato en sepia*, 2000) featured characters who had appeared or been mentioned in *The House of the Spirits*. Allende once

again structured her stories to encompass the experiences of several generations, this time capturing the cultural interchange that has linked the western United States with Latin American countries. About *Daughter of Fortune*, *Publishers Weekly* noted that "Allende expands her geographical boundaries in this sprawling, engrossing historical novel flavored by four cultures—English, Chilean, Chinese, and American—and set during the 1849 California Gold Rush."

Daughter of Fortune landed on best-seller lists and brought Allende an important rush of popular U.S. acceptance and a virtual guarantee of substantial future sales—it was named a "pick" by the nationwide book club headed by talk-show host Oprah Winfrey. Allende was the first Hispanic author Winfrey had ever selected. Continuing to create new examples in her series of strong female characters, Allende remains in the process of redefining, for the general U.S. reading public as well as for Spanish-language readers, the image of Latin American fiction.

Works in Literary Context

Many of Allende's books are noted for their feminine perspective, dramatic qualities of romance and struggle, and the magical realism genre often found in Latin American literature. Allende has shared many memories, both real and fictional, with her readers. She has examined political issues, related stories of her "interesting" childhood, enthralled readers with magical ideas, and shared the beauties of her homeland. The large topical span of Allende's writings makes it difficult to classify the author as a particular type.

Strength of Character Allende's family members included a number of politicians and diplomats. While she received a strong education in private schools, the beginning of Allende's growth into a novelist can be marked by the personal and public tragedy she suffered when her godfather Salvador Allende was assassinated in a coup in Chile. The strength she had to muster in her private life can be seen in the characters she has created, especially the female ones.

Allende's female characters survive hardships—imprisonment, starvation, the loss of loved ones—but never lose their spirit or ability to love others. In reference to *The House of the Spirits*, Philip Howard contended in the *Times of London*, "It is a remarkable achievement to make the old monster lovable not just to his wife, daughter, and granddaughter, and the other women in his life, but also to the reader." Although much of her writing includes political approaches similar to that of other Latin American writers, it also contains "an original feminist argument that suggests [a] women's monopoly on powers that oppose the violent 'paternalism' from which countries like Chile continue to suffer," according to *Chicago Tribune* contributor Bruce Allen. Alberto Manguel likewise considered important Allende's "depiction

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Allende's famous contemporaries include:

Cormac McCarthy (1933–): McCarthy is an American novelist whose work often emphasizes the interactions of Mexican and American culture.

Daniel Alarcón (1977–): This Peruvian short-story writer and novelist is considered one of the leading figures in contemporary literature.

Esther "Eppie" Pauline Friedman Lederer (better known as Ann Landers) (1918–2002): A popular American journalist, Landers was one of the best known advice columnists of her time.

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986): O'Keeffe was an American painter renowned for her paintings of New Mexico landscapes and her erotic depictions of flowers.

of woman as a colonial object," as he wrote in the *Tor-onto Globe and Mail*.

Magical Realism Magical realism as a literary style typically demonstrates a strong narrative drive in which the recognizably realistic mingles with the unexpected and inexplicable. It has been suggested that Allende uses magical realism both to jostle the reader out of preconceived understandings of events and to allow herself the opportunity to reinterpret these events from a woman's perspective. In the tradition of writers of magical realism, such as Gabriel García Márquez, Allende often blends elements of realism and fantasy in her works to examine the tumultuous social and political heritage of South America. She frequently draws upon her own experiences as well as those of her family to emphasize the role of personal memory as a record of the violence and repression that characterizes much of Latin American history.

Despite her recurring use of moral and political themes, Allende maintains that she does not intend to create political fiction. "I write about the things I care about," she has stated; "poverty, inequality, and social problems are part of politics, and that's what I write about.... I just can't write in an ivory tower, distant from what's happening in the real world and from the reality of my continent. So the politics just steps in, in spite of myself."

Works in Critical Context

Allende's fiction as a whole has received mixed reviews. While some commentators regard her works as derivative or melodramatic, most commend her polished technique, including the lushly detailed prose and compelling images that subtly convey her moral and political themes. Some debate has ensued, however, over whether she

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Allende's novels often feature strong women prevailing in chaotic and violent times. Other works featuring such figures include:

Medea (431 BCE), a play by Euripides. In this classic Greek drama, Medea is the spurned wife of legendary hero Jason. She wreaks a horrible vengeance on Jason and, unusually for a Greek play, gets away with it.

Gone with the Wind (1936), a novel by Margaret Mitchell. Resourceful Southern belle Scarlett O'Hara is forced to rebuild her life in the aftermath of the American Civil

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. Winner of multiple prizes, this science fiction novel is set in a fictional future theocracy in which women have lost all civil rights.

War in this classic novel.

Beloved (1987), a novel by Toni Morrison. The story of Sethe, an escaped slave, and her daughter as they attempt to come to terms with the violent legacy of slavery.

successfully combines her political ideas with the fantastic elements in her fiction. Much critical analysis of Allende's work has been devoted to her feminist perspective as well, and her depiction of the patriarchal society of Latin America has been applauded, although some critics charge that her portrayals of Latin males are frequently stereotypically macho and that she at times resorts to other clichés about Hispanics.

The House of the Spirits Following three generations of the Trueba family and their domestic and political conflicts, The House of the Spirits "is a novel of peace and reconciliation, in spite of the fact that it tells of bloody, tragic events," claimed New York Times Book Review contributor Alexander Coleman. "The author has accomplished this not only by plumbing her memory for the familial and political textures of the continent, but also by turning practically every major Latin American novel on its head," the critic continued.

Allende's grand scope and use of fantastic elements and characters have led many critics to compare *The House of the Spirits* specifically to Nobel Prize-winner Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). "Allende has her own distinctive voice, however," noted a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer; "while her prose lacks the incandescent brilliance of the master's, it has a whimsical charm, besides being clearer, more accessible and more explicit about the contemporary situation in South America." In contrast, *Village Voice* contributor Enrique Fernandez believed that "only the dullest reader

can fail to be distracted by the shameless cloning from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*." "Allende is very much under the influence of Gabriel García Márquez, but she is scarcely an imitator," remarked *Washington Post Book World* critic Jonathan Yardley, concluding that "she is most certainly a novelist in her own right and, for a first novelist, a startlingly skillful, confident one."

While The House of the Spirits contains some of the magical realism so characteristic of late-twentieth-century Latin American fiction, it is counterbalanced by the political realities that Allende recounts. Times Literary Supplement reviewer Antony Beevor stated that whereas the early chapters of The House of the Spirits seem "to belong firmly in the school of magical realism," a closer reading "suggests that Isabel Allende's tongue is lightly in her cheek. It soon becomes clear that she has taken the genre to flip it over," the critic elaborated. "The metaphorical house, the themes of time and power, the *machista* violence and the unstoppable merry-go-round of history: all of these are reworked and then examined from the other side—from a woman's perspective." Other critics, however, faulted Allende for trying to combine the magical and the political. Richard Eder of the Los Angeles Times Book Review felt that the author "rarely manages to integrate her magic and her message," while Nation contributor Paul West wrote that the political story is "the book Allende probably wanted to write, and would have had she not felt obliged to toe the line of magical realism." But others maintained that the contrast between the fantastic and political segments is effective, as Harriet Waugh of the Spectator explained: "[The] magic gradually dies away as a terrible political reality engulfs the people of the country. Ghosts, the gift of foretelling the future and the ability to make the pepper and salt cellars move around the dining-room table cannot survive terror, mass-murder and torture."

Eva Luna "Fears that Isabel Allende might be a 'onebook' writer, that her first...success would be her only one, ought to be quashed by Eva Luna," asserted Abigail E. Lee in the Times Literary Supplement. "The eponymous protagonist and narrator of this, her third novel, has an engaging personality, a motley collection of interesting acquaintances and an interesting angle on political upheavals in the unnamed Latin-American republic in which she lives." "In Eva Luna, Allende moves between the personal and the political, between realism and fantasy, weaving two exotic coming-of-age stories-Eva Luna's and Rolf Carle's—into the turbulent coming of age of her unnamed South American country," Elizabeth Benedict summarized in Chicago's Tribune Books. Switching between the stories of the two protagonists, Eva Luna is "filled with a multitude of characters and tales," recounted Washington Post Book World contributor Alan Ryan. Allende's work is "a remarkable novel," the critic elaborated, "one in which a cascade of stories tumbles out before the reader, stories vivid and passionate and human enough to engage, in their own right, all the reader's attention and sympathy."

Inés of My Soul In her 2006 novel, Inés of My Soul (Inés del alma mia), Allende blends history and feminism to tell the story of Inés Suarez, often called the mother of Chile. This sixteenth-century historical figure was born in a poor Spanish village in 1509 and made a life for herself in the New World, becoming the mistress of the Chilean governor and helping to battle Native Americans who besieged the capital of Santiago. As a Kirkus Reviews critic noted, Inés Suarez's life "was full of daring, intrigue and passionate romance." However, for this same critic Allende's novel missed much of that adventure, devolving instead into "turgid and detached homework masquerading as epic." Similarly, Jennifer Reese, writing in Entertainment Weekly, thought that Allende's novel was a "bodice ripper" that "turn[s] a truly extraordinary life story into a forgettable, easy-reading romp." A more positive assessment was delivered by a Publishers Weekly contributor who noted: "Allende crafts a swift, thrilling epic, packed with fierce battles and passionate romance." Likewise, Amber Haq, writing in Newsweek International, termed Inés of My Soul "a powerfully evocative narrative," and concluded: "Allende inspires women everywhere with the true story of one who wouldn't be tamed, who knew her own power and lived to taste its glory." New York Times Book Review critic Maggie Galehouse felt that "Allende succeeds in resurrecting a woman from history and endowing her with the gravitas of a hero."

Responses to Literature

- 1. How does Allende's depiction of women compare with female characters in other Latin American novels? Do her female characters ring true?
- 2. Read a novel by another writer known for a style of magical realism. How does Allende's use of magical realism differ from that of the author you chose? Do you believe, as some critics do, that Allende's use of magical realism is satirical? Why or why not?
- 3. Read Allende's *Zorro* (2005). How does Allende's portrayal of Zorro differ from Antonio Banderas's portrayal of Zorro in the movies *The Mask of Zorro* and *The Legend of Zorro*? What factors account for the differences?

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■ Jorge Amado

BORN: 1912, Itabuna, Bahia, Brazil DIED: 2001, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil

NATIONALITY: Brazilian GENRE: Fiction, drama

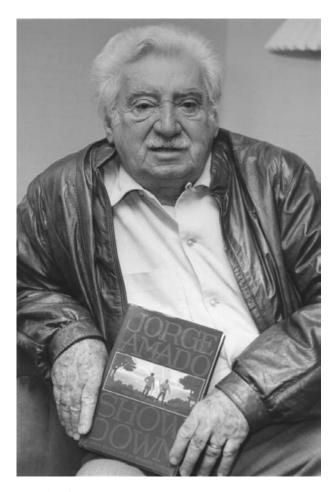
MAJOR WORKS: Cacao (1933)

The Violent Land (1943)

Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands (1966)

Overview

Jorge Amado is an internationally acclaimed author whose novels have been translated into more than forty languages. The majority of his works are set in the Bahia region of northeastern Brazil and reveal the author's fascination with the rich cultural heritage of Bahia's inhabitants, most of whom are of mixed European,



Jorge Amado Amado, Jorge, photograph. AP Images.

African, and native Indian ancestry. Amado's later writings, which have made him a best-selling author worldwide, are more expansive and less overtly political, tempering social criticism with satire, ironic humor, and raucous comedy.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Lessons from Poverty Amado was born the son of immigrant farmers on a cacao plantation in Southern Bahia. When he was old enough to work, he spent his summer holidays toiling in the cacao groves with other area laborers. These early episodes among Brazil's impoverished proved an invaluable learning experience for Amado and provided a foundation for much of his writing.

Brazil in the Early Twentieth Century Following a global economic crisis that had shattered the coffee industry and forced an unprecedented number of Brazilians into poverty, Brazil's 1930 presidential election was rife with revolution. When the liberal challenger Getulio Vargas met with apparent defeat, he headed an armed rebellion against the state—gaining control of civilian and military establishments, dissolving the congress, and issuing a decree of absolute power for his government. Initially, the overthrow of the old order produced a renaissance of sorts among Brazil's writers. Vargas had championed achievement and reform, and the writers were quick to adopt this spirit of social renewal. The new critical literature of Brazil lay bare the squalor of its lower classes and offered solutions for a nation restless for change.

Amado in Prison Amado's early novels—often termed works of social protest—were published amid these turbulent times. Carnival Land (1931), Sweat (1934), and Cacao (1933), all depict a destitute and violent Brazil and offer answers to many of the prevailing social problems. Amado was not alone in his attempts to affect social change. As nationwide impatience with the economic plight grew, Vargas' support waned. Several political factions—notably the Communist party and the fascist Integralistas—began to exert a marked influence among Brazilians. In 1935, a short-lived rebellion broke out, and Vargas subsequently declared martial law. Communists and other labeled seditionists were hunted down relentlessly, and a censorship department was created to suppress all forms of dissent. Amado's inflammatory early novels, though given little regard by critics, attracted the suspicious eye of the Vargas regime. Amado was imprisoned as a member of the Communist Party in 1935, exiled on several later occasions, and, in 1937 following a national ban, two thousand of his books were burned in a plaza by the Brazilian military.

Refined Techniques Increase Literary Acclaim The Vargas crackdown did not silence the writers' call for reform so much as alter the form of protest. Starting with Amado's 1935 book *Jubiaba*, Amado began to display a greater concern for technique, often cloaking social themes within psychological studies. This new style found its greatest success in *The Violent Land*. Published in 1942, *The Violent Land* depicts the brutal land-battles that ensue when two neighboring estates rush for the last, precious cacao groves in northern Brazil.

In 1958, with the publication of *Gabriela*, *Clove and Cinnamon*, Amado's writing took another significant shift. As in his earlier work, the lower classes of Brazil's Bahia region continued to dominate Amado's novels. Beginning with *Gabriela*, *Clove and Cinnamon*, however, the examination of their afflictions gave way to romantic and humorous themes.

Amado's next novel, Os pastores da noite (1964; translated as Shepherds of the Night, 1967), is divided into three distinct episodes that take place in the poorest neighborhoods of Salvador. The book deals with characters from the lowest classes who have in common their misery and hopes for a better future. In January 1965, Amado traveled to Paris, where he stayed three months to finish his novel, Dona Flor e seus dois maridos (1966; translated as Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands, 1969), which became a social phenomenon in Brazil and achieved enormous international success. It tells the story of Flor, a young Bahian woman, who is married to Vadinho, a great lover but an incorrigible drunk and rogue. Dona Flor e seus dois maridos was adapted for cinema and theater. A motion picture, directed by Luís Carlos Barreto and starring Brazilian star Sónia Braga, was released in Latin America, Europe, and the United States in 1976. There was also a Hollywood remake, Kiss Me Goodbye (1982), directed by Robert Mulligan and starring Sally Field, James Caan, and Jeff Bridges. A musical adaptation appeared on Broadway in 1979, and in 1997, TV Globo produced a miniseries based on the novel.

Criticism from Feminists The highly anticipated Tenda dos milagres (translated as Tent of Miracles, 1971) was published in 1969. A motion picture based on the novel, directed by Nélson Pereira dos Santos, premiered in 1977. Amado received a prize from the Instituto Italo-Latino Americano (Italian Institute of Latin America) in 1976. Amado's next two novels, Tereza Batista cansada de Guerra (1972; translated as Tereza Batista: Home from the Wars, 1975) and Tieta do Agreste: pastora de cabras (1977; translated as Tieta the Goat Girl, 1979), have young promiscuous girls turned prostitutes as protagonists. These works attracted criticism from academics, especially feminists, who began to describe Amado as a misogynist who exploits his female protagonists by always reducing them to male fantasies, making them champions of the only two skills that seem to be available to them: sex and cooking.

Childhood Memoirs In 1979, Farda, fardão, camisola de dormer (translated as Pen, Sword, Camisole, 1985)

was published. This novel, set during World War II, is another example of Amado's preference for multiple complex narrative voices. The novel offers a glance at an aspect of the writer's life since Amado had been a member of the Academy of Letters since 1961. By 1981, Amado's prolific and successful literary career had stretched over fifty years. He celebrated this landmark with the publication of his childhood memoirs, O menino grapiúna (1981, The Coastal Child) and several works for children, including O gato malhado e a andorinha Sinhá (1976; translated as The Swallow and the Tomcat, 1982)

Brazilian Cocoa Wars In 1984, Amado returned to an old favorite theme of his, that of the cocoa wars in northeast Brazil at the turn of the century. Tocaia Grande (1984, The Big Ambush; translated as Showdown, 1988), like Terras do sem fim, is a frontier novel with picaresque and fantastic elements. The publication of Tocaia Grande preceded long-awaited political change in Brazil. In 1985, a civilian government returned, ending a prolonged series of military dictatorships. The opening of the Fundação Casa de Jorge Amado (Jorge Amado Foundation's House) in Salvador da Bahia in 1987 confirmed Amado's place as a Brazilian institution.

Insights into the Author's Personal Life Osumiço da santa: uma história de feitiçaria (1988, The Saint's Disappearance: A Magic Tale; translated as The War of the Saints, 1995) was written in Paris between the summer of 1987 and the summer of 1988. Two books printed in the early 1990s provided many insights on the novelist's personal life. In 1990, Amado published a series of interviews with his French translator and dear friend Alice Raillard, Conversando com Alice Raillard (Conversations with Alice Raillard). The publication of Navegação de cabotagem: apontamentos para um livro de memórias que jamais escreverei (1992, Coastal Navigation: Notes for a Book of Memoirs That I Will Never Write) tells the author's life story in a series of journal entries that do not appear in chronological order. These memoirs feature many amusing anecdotes that marked the novelist's life.

Three National Days of Mourning After 1998, Amado spent most of his time in his house, surrounded by family and friends. Somewhat weakened by heart problems that resulted in several hospitalizations and surgeries, the beloved Brazilian writer continued to receive prizes and honors. On August 6, 2001, shortly before his eighty-ninth birthday, the novelist was rushed to a hospital in Salvador, where he died of a heart attack. Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso declared three days of national mourning, and thousands of people filed past the novelist's open casket on the day of his funeral. Following his demands, Amado was cremated, and his ashes were spread around a mango tree in the garden adjoining his house.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Amado's famous contemporaries include:

Ivan Goff (1910–1999): Australian screenwriter whose works include the 1970s TV series *Charlie's Angels*.

L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986): American science-fiction writer and founder of the Church of Scientology.

Wallace Stegner (1909–1993): American short-story, novel, and history writer whose novel *Angle of Repose* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1972.

Akira Kurosawa (1910–1998): Japanese film director whose career spanned a fifty-year period of activity.

Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008): American religious leader and fifteenth president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who served in office from 1995 until his death in 2008.

Walter Sisulu (1912–2003): South African anti-apartheid activist and member of the American National Congress.

Works in Literary Context

Amado was widely known as the writer of the people. Most of his books deal with the struggles and exploitation of working class Brazilians. Amado's characters are a mixture of good and bad, bloody killers and goodhearted villains, street kids and workers, prostitutes and circus owners, landlords and political leaders, musicians, poets, and religious men. Amado's works share an emphasis on Brazilian popular culture and folklore, including representative elements such as *Carnaval* and the Afro-Brazilian religious cult of *candomblé*—a type of African spirit worship brought by slaves to Brazil in the 1550s. As such, Amado's work demonstrates characteristics both of social realism and magical realism, and as his career developed, there is an increasing mixture of these seemingly incongruous elements.

Social Realism Amado's first three novels, Carnival Land, Cacao, and Sweat, are generally faulted for being excessively pedantic in expressing communist solutions to social problems. Nonetheless, Jubiaba (1935), Amado's fourth novel, is regarded as his first artistic success. In this work, set in Salvador, Amado details a young black man's struggle against social injustice, infusing the story with elements of Brazilian and African folk traditions. Jubiaba was Amado's earliest attempt to capture the multi-ethnic spirit of Brazil's capital city, an endeavor that evolved into a prominent feature of his artistry.

Magical Realism Although Amada never completely abandoned social realism, his later work incorporated elements of magical realism. In this style of writing, magical occurrences are common and are considered

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The idealism Amado expresses in his early work was intended to effect social change in Brazil. Essentially, Amado promoted a communist ideal as a solution to the social problems he depicted in his first novels, and he has, indeed, been charged with using the art form of the novel as a mere vehicle for his political agenda. Because art has a powerful way of moving people emotionally and intellectually, it is not uncommon to find in works of art a political undercurrent. Here are a few more examples of works that use artistic forums to express political and social ideals:

Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), a novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe. This anti-slavery work had such a large impact that it intensified the sectional conflict, which preceded the American Civil War.

Atlas Shrugged (1957), a novel by Ayn Rand. This work describes the negative effects of socialism and is punctuated by a spirited speech in defense of capitalism delivered by the novel's hero, John Galt.

Happy Feet (2006), an animated film directed by George Miller. This work brings to light the problems that arise from irresponsible waste management policies.

commonplace by both the narrator of these tales and the characters who are affected by these magical events. Amado's *Shepherds of the Night* (1964) deals with characters from the lowest classes who have in common their misery and hopes for a better future: vagabonds, drunks, cheaters, prostitutes, rogues, and scoundrels. Amado sees ritual as a possible solution for social discrepancies and makes use of magic realism to demonstrate his point. Indeed, according to Amado, the gathering and inclusion of people of different races and social backgrounds in a deeply rooted cultural and religious cult show that all Brazilians can take their destinies into their own hands and solve their problems.

Amado's use of magical realism may, in fact, be a precursor to Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez's use of the popular technique in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. After the success of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, magical realism gained popularity in South and Central America, so much so that many of the major literary works to come from these lands in the past fifty years or so have included the technique. Amado, it seems, was a little before his time.

Works in Critical Context

The critical debate surrounding Amado makes it clear that his works have left few people unmoved. Although Amado has detractors, his exceptional national and international fame and his personal accomplishments, including an array of prestigious awards and honors, speak for his importance in Brazilian literary history. Speaking to the power of Amado's writing, Fred P. Ellison writes: "In the works of this most controversial of modern Brazilian writer, unevenness is the salient characteristic. Amado seems to write solely by instinct. Of conscious art intellectually arrived at, the result of reflection and high craftsmanship, there is relatively little. Yet his novels have a mysterious power to sweep the reader along. Serious defects in artistry are overcome by the novelist's ability to weave a story, to construct vivid scenes, and to create fascinating characters."

Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands Like most of Amado's later novels, Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands blends elements of burlesque with the surreal. Critic David Gallagher granted credit for the success of this strange brew to Amado's convincing characters. "Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands is a remarkable novel for the coolness with which the author is able to impose his extraordinary characters on us," Gallagher wrote in the New York Times Book Review. "Like them, we learn to take exoticism and magic in our stride." A Time magazine critic charged Dona Flor with overblown sentimentalism, calling the book "a love letter to Bahia." The reviewer claimed that Amado "romanticizes his Bahians into virile lovers, darkly sensual morenas [women], whores and neighbors, all larger than life.... In lavishing details of color, touch and taste, Amado so ignores the canons of construction that at times he seems embarked on little more than an engaging shaggy-dog story." Gallagher held a similar opinion of Amado's prose: "It is a pity that Amado mars his achievement by often writing flatly, without discipline or tension. His refreshing exuberance is diminished by the novel's almost aggressive repetitiveness. Cut to half its size, it would have been a better book."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Amado's early work is marked by its promotion of communistic ideals. Read one of the early novels from Amado's career—*Cacao*, for example—and discuss its attempt to effect social change. How does it fashion its argument? Which argument seems to be the most effective? Why? Cite specific passages to support your response.
- 2. What role does magical realism play in *Shepherds of the Night*? Why do you think Amado chose to use elements of magical realism in this text?
- 3. Amado's work is often deprecated as being extremely vulgar and concerned with the down-and-out figures in Brazil, like "whores." Amado himself was unconcerned with this criticism, even though it arguably kept him from receiving wider critical acclaim. Perhaps, as some scholars suggest, literature that is more

- "refined" receives more critical acclaim than literature that is more popular in tone, language, and content. In your opinion, what accounts for this disparity between what is prized by critics and what is prized by the public?
- 4. After having read an Amado text or two that incorporates magical realism, give the technique a shot. Write a short story or take one you've already written, and like a magician, sprinkle a little magic onto the text. Then, in a short essay, discuss how these changes alter the overall effect of the story.

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Yehuda Amichai

BORN: 1924, Würzburg, Germany DIED: 2000, Jerusalem, Israel NATIONALITY: German, Israeli GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

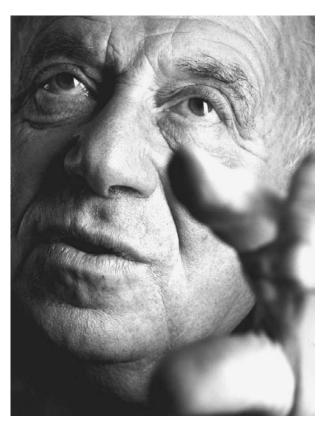
Not of This Time, Not of This Place (1963)

Open Closed Open (1998)

Two Hopes Apart

Overview

An influential member of Israel's first literary generation, Yehuda Amichai synthesizes in his poetry the biblical rhythms and imagery of ancient Hebrew with modern Hebraic colloquialisms to try to make sense of the dislocation and alienation experienced by many Jews escaping genocide in Europe for perpetual war in Israel.



Yehuda Amichai Amichai, Yehuda, photograph by John Reeves. Reproduced by permission.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Youth Spent in War Yehuda Amichai was born in Würzburg, Germany in 1924. Twelve years later, during the Nazification of Germany that led up to World War II (1939–1945), he emigrated with his parents to Palestine, then a British protectorate in the Middle East. Although his family avoided the horrors of Nazi Germany, Amichai lost many friends and relatives in concentration camps, a loss that haunted him throughout his life. He served in the Jewish Brigade of the British Army in North Africa during World War II, one of around five thousand Palestinian Jews to do so. After Allied victory in the war, the United Nations created the state of Israel in 1947, establishing it as a Jewish homeland—in large part as a response to the Holocaust, in which over 6 million Jews were slaughtered in Nazi camps throughout Germany and German-occupied territories in Europe. Amichai then served with Israeli defense forces during the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, which controversially expanded Israel's territory after a combined attack from Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon was repulsed. These experiences, along with witnessing and soldiering in Israel's other wars of the mid-twentieth century, strongly influenced Amichai's work; many of his poems and short

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Amichai's famous contemporaries include:

Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970): An Israeli novelist whose works examine the conflict between traditional Jewish culture and the contemporary world, Agnon was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1966 jointly with German poet Nelly Sachs.

Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962): Known as the "architect of the Holocaust" during World War II, this German Nazi was captured by Israeli agents in Argentina, convicted of crimes against humanity and war crimes by an Israeli court, and executed.

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997): A Jewish-American poet and cofounder of the Beatnik school of writing, Ginsberg remains well known for his long poem "Howl," which was initially banned for its explicit language and frank references to homosexuality.

Amos Oz (1939–): An Israeli novelist and writer, Oz argues for a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Nelly Sachs (1891–1970): A Jewish German poet known for her lyrical, mournful work, Sachs was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1966 jointly with Israeli novelist Shmuel Yosef Agnon.

stories revolve around themes associated with war and its aftermath.

Contemporary Poetry for a Contemporary World Amichai received his degree from Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1955 and began teaching biblical and Hebrew literature in high schools. He published his first book of poetry in 1955 as well, Now and in Other Days, which was revolutionary for its use of colloquial Hebrew. His 1958 collection, Two Hopes Apart, established him as a major Israeli poet. He was one of the first poets writing in Hebrew to use images of tanks, airplanes, and other technology in his poetry, reflecting his belief that contemporary poetry should embrace the contemporary world.

Negotiating Identity After the Holocaust Amichai first gained the notice of British and American audiences with the English translations of Amen (1977) and Time (1978), two volumes of poetry Amichai translated with the English poet Ted Hughes. Both books address the spiritual and political concerns of the Jewish people. Amichai's deep and ongoing engagement with history and its impact on individual lives is evident in much of his poetry and in his 1963 novel, Not of This Time, Not of This Place. In this book, a Jewish archeologist is torn between returning to the German town where he grew

up—like the author himself—and staying in Jerusalem to carry out his extramarital affair. The novel is generally considered a seminal work of Israeli Holocaust literature, investigating two options for living with the knowledge of Nazi genocide: Negotiate with the consequences of the past or deny it.

Turning to the Tanakh Later in his life, Amichai turned more and more to Hebrew scriptures as a route to understanding himself and the world, focusing on matters both internal and external. In Great Tranquillity: Questions and Answers (1983), Amichai addresses Israel's troubled political history and its paradoxical desert land-scape, which is both arid and rich with promise. "Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela" is a sequence of fifty-seven poems in which Amichai analyzes his Jewish identity by comparing his life story with legends of a wandering medieval rabbi. Published separately in book-length form as Travels in 1986, this work also appears in his Selected Poetry (1986), a compilation of verse from ten volumes published over a thirty-year period.

In Even a Fist Was Once an Open Palm with Fingers (1991), Amichai again draws from the Tanakh, the holy text of Judaism, to illustrate the individual's struggle with history. And the very late Open Closed Open (1998) is widely seen as Amichai's masterpiece. The twenty-five linked poems in this collection examine human nature and universal concerns through the lens of the Jewish spiritual tradition and Israel's justified fears about the future. At the time of publishing, the Oslo Peace Process begun in 1993 had helped Israel achieve a limited peace with its separatist Palestinian minority—after years of religiously inflected civil war and tension—but Amichai's concerns about a future for Israel were prescient. As a result of the failure of that peace process in 2000, Israeli-Palestinian hostilities flared back up, and remained yet to be resolved still in 2008.

Over the course of a lifetime concerned with negotiation of identity in the presence of others, the effort to understand the self as a part of society and of culture, Amichai married twice, and had three children. Although nominated numerous times for the Nobel Prize in Literature, he never won. Amichai died of cancer on September 22, 2000, in Jerusalem, Israel, and was buried there.

Works in Literary Context

Negotiating with the Traditions of Judaism Yehuda Amichai's artistic life was in nearly every way a negotiation of his Jewish identity, of the traditions to which he was heir, and of the world and regional politics that shaped his options for being and for writing. Throughout his career, Amichai had frequent recourse to a rich and varied Jewish literary tradition, and attempted to synthesize the stylistic and conceptual offerings of that tradition with the colloquial Hebrew spoken in Israel, as well as with the ever-shifting and often

threatening circumstances surrounding the modern Israeli state.

British and American Influences Serving in the British Army during World War II exposed Amichai to British and American poetry, and the influence of the Irish poet Dylan Thomas and the British-American poet W. H. Auden can be seen in his early work. "[German poet Rainer Maria] Rilke," writes Robert Alter, "is another informing presence for him, occasionally in matters of style—he has written vaguely Rilkesque elegies but perhaps more as a model for using a language of here and now as an instrument to catch the glimmerings of a metaphysical beyond." Edward Hirsch agreed, writing for the New York Times Book Review that Amichai's early work was "influenced by W. H. Auden...and by such poets as [English Metaphysical] John Donne and [Welsh Metaphysical] George Herbert." Hirsch contrasts that with his later work, finding "a sparer and more informal poet whose colloquial free verse rhythms seem modeled, perhaps, on [American modernist poet] William Carlos Williams and whose profuse imagery and lightning-flash analogies may be compared to Deep Imagism."

Works in Critical Context

Yehuda Amichai is generally considered one of the most important poets of his generation of Israeli writers, focusing as he does on Israelis' painful and often ambivalent feelings about their post-Holocaust and postliberation existence. His poetry is widely praised by an international audience for its spare, honest exploration of emotions many people find too painful to face. But Amichai is not without his detractors. Some critics find his work simplistic and missing a crucial core philosophy, since Amichai, like many of his peers, does not align himself with one specific political view. Nonetheless, Amichai's work is admired overall for the strong, if sometimes sorrowful and confused, passion it displays. Though his poetry is sometimes described as lacking a comprehensive philosophical system because of his seemingly simple observations and syntax, it is his ability to infuse ordinary moments with extraordinary metaphysical meaning that first drew international attention to his work.

In an online review for the *East Bay Express*, Stephen Kessler notes that Amichai has "long been one of the planet's preeminent poets.... Jewish down to the bones, his humanity is broadly universal, obsessed as Amichai [was] with time and death, war and peace, love and memory, joy and suffering." And *New Republic* essayist and American poet C. K. Williams finds in Amichai's work "the shrewdest and most solid of poetic intelligences."

Open Closed Open According to C. K. Williams, *Open Closed Open* "comprises a sustained outburst of inspiration, and it has a...complicated relation to wisdom and to matters of the spirit." Williams continues: "To sojourn with Amichai in the vast, rugged, sympa-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Yehuda Amichai's poems and short stories revolve around war and its aftermath. Here are some other works that deal with this theme.

The Country Between Us (1981), a collection of poetry by Carolyn Forche. The poems in this collection focus on the situation in El Salvador during the 1970s, when the country was ruled by the military and government-linked death squads terrorized its citizens.

"Death Fugue" (1944), a poem by Paul Celan. This poem by the German Jewish poet memorializes the Nazi death camps of World War II. Celan struggled with continuing to write in German after the Nazi atrocities.

Maus (1992), a graphic novel by Art Spiegelman. This Pulitzer Prize—winning graphic novel tells of the author's father's experience surviving the Holocaust and the war's effects on his family today.

War Requiem (1989), a film directed by Derek Jarman. This movie, based on Benjamin Britten's 1962 composition of the same name, which incorporates World War I soldier and poet Wilfred Owen's work with the Latin mass for the dead, stars Laurence Olivier in his last performance.

thetic domain of his imagination is to be given leave to linger in one of those privileged moments when we are in a confidential and confident engagement with our own spirits...."

Daniel Weissbort writes, "This poet's work, in its expansiveness and humanity, enriches all its readers and has been crucial in enabling the new literature of Israel to engage in a creative dialogue with the entire problematical and paradoxical history of the Jewish people." Amichai, in short, might be termed a poet of universal Jewishness; in his own complex negotiation with Jewish identity after the Holocaust, he wrote works that speak to all people in all times.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Yehuda Amichai wrote in Hebrew, which was then translated into English for British and American audiences. How well do you think literature, especially poetry, can be translated? What are some problems that might occur when translating poetry into another language?
- 2. Choose a song or poem you like. Write a prose "translation" of its meaning. Do you feel that you were able to translate the nuances of the original? Explain the differences between the two.

- 3. Amichai's work has been criticized by some because he does not align himself with one particular political point of view. Do you think that it is easier for writers to succeed if their work expresses clearly defined beliefs or belief systems? In what ways would that benefit the writer, and in what ways might it hurt the writer's success?
- 4. Amichai believed that he never won the Nobel Prize because of his political views. Should a writer's personal politics matter when we judge his or her art, or just the quality of the art? What about a musician or actor? If these realms seem different to you, why is that?
- 5. When crimes against humanity occur, as in the Holocaust, they are often denied even as they are happening. The horrors of the Nazi concentration camps, for example, were virtually unknown to the rest of the world until they were confirmed by advancing Allied troops. Research the Museum Mapping Initiative (www.ushmm.org/maps). The Initiative has teamed up with Google Earth to show satellite images of areas in which genocide is currently alleged to be taking place. Write an essay analyzing the impact this immediate, objective information might have on nations' decisions about whether to intervene for the public good.

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⊠ Kingsley Amis

BORN: 1922, London, England DIED: 1995, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction; poetry; criticism

MAJOR WORKS: Lucky Jim (1954)

The James Bond Dossier (1965) The Anti-Death League (1966)

The Old Devils (1985)

Overview

Although an eclectic man of letters, Kingsley Amis was best known as a prolific novelist who, in the words of Blake Morrison in the *Times Literary Supplement*, had the "ability to go on surprising us." He won critical acclaim in 1954 with the publication of his first novel, *Lucky Jim*. After producing three other humorous works, Amis was quickly characterized as a comic novelist writing in the tradition of P. G. Wodehouse and Evelyn Waugh. Critics ranked him among the foremost of the "Angry Young Men," a school of British writers who disdained post—World War II British society throughout the 1950s.



Kingsley Amis Amis, Kingsley, photograph by Jerry Bauer. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

William D. Montalbano of the *Los Angeles Times* stated that "Amis rejected the label as 'a very boring journalistic phrase." Following his early works, however, Amis produced a spate of novels that differed radically in genre and seriousness of theme. He kept "experimenting with ways of confounding the reader who hopes for a single focus," claimed William Hutchings in the *Critical Quarterly*, though Clancy Sigal suggested in the *National Review* that Amis simply had "the virtue, rare in England, of refusing to accept an imposed definition of what a Serious Writer ought to write about." His place in British literature was recognized in 1986, when his seventeenth novel, *The Old Devils*, won the Booker Prize, Britain's highest literary award. In 1990, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Middle-Class Boy to Oxford Man An only child, Amis enjoyed a comfortable but dull relationship with his Baptist, Conservative, lower-middle-class parents, William Robert and Rosa Lucas Amis. Recalling his father, an office worker, as "the most English human being I have ever known," Amis added that boredom rather than hostility was his chief response to his father's company.

School was more rewarding than family life. Amis attended Norbury College, where at the age of eleven he had his first story, "The Sacred Rhino of Uganda," published in the school magazine. He then entered the City of London School, where he remained until 1941 as a scholarship student. Amis writes enthusiastically about his years at this excellent day school, recalling the broad range of social strata from which its students were drawn and its humane spirit of tolerance: "I have never in my life known a community where factions of any kind were less in evidence, where differences of class, upbringing, income group and religion counted for so little." Academic standards were high, and Amis, specializing first in classics and then in English, maintained a level that earned him a scholarship to St. John's College, Oxford. Although Amis became acquainted with members of the upper class, his middle-class roots instilled in him a skepticism of the pretense found among the wealthy and wellheeled; this clash of classes later became the fodder for some of his most popular works.

While Amis was in school, England entered World War II as one of the Allied nations battling against Nazi Germany's advance across western Europe. Amis was called for military service when he was twenty and served three years in the army (in France, Belgium, and West Germany), having been commissioned because, he says, "an Oxford man was likely to be enough of a 'gentleman' to do all right as an officer." Late in 1945, at the age of twenty-three, he returned to St. John's where he earned a first-class degree in 1947 but failed to win a research degree when his thesis ("Poets and Their Public, 1850—

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Amis's famous contemporaries include:

Robertson Davies (1913–1995): A preeminent Canadian novelist whose work often deals with religion and metaphysics while interweaving theatrical elements with traditional novel forms.

Richard Nixon (1913–1994): This U.S. president's time in office was marred by the Watergate scandal, which eventually forced Nixon to resign to avoid being impeached.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): This Spanish artist worked in a variety of media, including paint and ceramics.

Although his work largely transcends barriers, he is often associated with the cubist art movement.

Graham Greene (1904–1991): This British novelist is known for the breadth of his work, which includes westerns, political thrillers, travelogues, and religious novels.

Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007): Prolific Swedish director, whose works include more than sixty films and more than one hundred plays.

1900") was rejected. He married Hilary A. Bardwell in 1948 and took a post as lecturer in English at the University College of Swansea in Wales.

Teacher, Husband, Father, Writer During the next half-dozen years, Amis labored to clarify his roles as teacher, husband, father (two of his three children were born during this time), and writer. His traditionally structured, colloquial, and wittily antiromantic poems began to appear in anthologies, and he occasionally read his works on John Wain's distinguished BBC poetry program, First Reading. A collection of his poems, A Frame of Mind (1953), helped to associate him in the public mind with Wain, Philip Larkin, Elizabeth Jennings, and Robert Conquest as part of a concerted dissent from tradition known as The Movement, a label whose validity each of them denied.

Although Amis continued to write and edit collections of poetry, his most significant work was his prose fiction. Also during these years, he was beginning his first major work, *Lucky Jim*, a novel about a lower-middle-class man who becomes a professor of a subject he dislikes and finds himself surrounded by upper-class colleagues he despises. The germ of the novel was the result of a brief encounter with faculty in the Senior Common Room at Leicester University, which Amis attended in 1946. "Christ," Amis recalls saying, "someone ought to do something about that lot." In 1951, he began "to do

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Amis's Jim Dixon has been deemed an antihero by author and critic Anthony Burgess. An antihero is a figure in a text who participates in shady dealings or immoral acts but who, due to the presentation of the author, appears to be a sympathetic—indeed, heroic—figure. Antiheroes became popular when the poet Lord Byron featured them in his poems. For instance, *Don Juan* describes the amorous flings of a sexually irresponsible man; yet the reader cannot help but root for Don Juan and against the husbands of his lovers. Since Byron, the antihero has been used to great effect in both literature and film. Here are some examples:

3:10 to Yuma (2007), a film directed by James Mangold. This adaptation of an Elmore Leonard short story depicts Ben Wade, a thief and gang leader in the Old West. As the movie proceeds, the viewer comes to understand and appreciate Ben Wade, even though it is also clear that he is a hardened criminal.

Batman (1939–), a comic book series by Bob Kane and Bill Finger. At first glance, Batman might appear to be an unmitigated positive hero, but upon closer examination, one sees that the questions surrounding Batman and his dark and mysterious past suggest a shady side to his character.

Crime and Punishment (1866), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In this novel, the most sympathetic character is Raskolnikov, a young man who murders a pawnbroker for no good reason.

something": he finished his manuscript a year later and saw it published at the outset of 1954.

A Mixed Bag At the outset of his career, Amis wrote, "We are in for a golden age of satire." In his best fiction, Amis validates his prophecy, deftly deflating pretension while expressing a genial affection for humanity. Later, however, misanthropy darkened Amis's comic sense without deepening his moral or psychological insight. Often, he seemed unable to decide whether his hero is admirable or despicable, or whether to celebrate or mourn the descent of man and society.

Works in Literary Context

More than fifty years after the turbulence attending the publication of his overwhelmingly popular first novel, *Lucky Jim* (1954), Kingsley Amis remains a controversial figure in English letters. Many find him an affable and entertaining novelist whose heroes are engagingly antic mimes. Behind the mild lunacy and benign irreverence, others discern in Amis's fiction a profound concern with serious moral problems. Fellow novelists such as Anthony

Burgess, Anthony Powell, V. S. Pritchett, and C. P. Snow have praised him. He has been lauded by critics as the successor to the satiric genius of Evelyn Waugh; as a dissenting realist in the tradition of Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding; as a diverting wit like P. G. Wodehouse or Peter DeVries; and has even been paradoxically labeled an "antiliberal, antigenteel, antimoralist...left conservative," like Norman Mailer.

Angry Young Man? Early in his career, Amis became associated with a group of writers known as "Angry Young Men." What linked these writers, who established a loose consortium, was less their anger (though all could pout and rage) than a shared class origin (lower or middle class, but not upper) and unsettled social and cultural values. They suffered the benefits of the post–World War II welfare state without grace or gratitude. Although the Labour Party government made possible their attendance at Oxford or Cambridge, they resisted what they identified as an obligation to embrace—in the name of culture and progress—what Richard Hoggart called the "shiny barbarism" of the middle class. Lucky Jim became the archetypal antihero of the Angry Young Men.

Nonetheless, in spite of all the journalistic declarations in the late 1950s about "Angry Young Men," a rebellion Amis supposedly led, he never was or claimed to be iconoclastic about society. Rather, the novels, whatever the setting, demonstrated an acceptance, no matter how ironic or grudging, of the social status quo. As such, Amis's work must be considered a predecessor in tone of the entire body of Philip Roth's work. American novelist Roth often utilizes a young, angry narrator, but the source of this narrator's anger is not merely a desire to escape his past and upbringing but to come to terms with it in light of his own individual personality and its relationship to the culture and society in which he was raised. A similar theme is evident in the later writer Tobias Wolff. However, Wolff employs a far less emphatic and demonstrative tone—though no less a pained one—in order to portray the desire of his characters to achieve social mobility and to attain happiness despite their upbringing.

Works in Critical Context

Writing in the Christmas 1955 issue of the *London Sunday Times*, Somerset Maugham described Jim Dixon, the young academic hero of *Lucky Jim* (which had, ironically, just won the Somerset Maugham Award for fiction), and his ilk as "white collar proletariat [who] do not go to the university to acquire culture, but to get a job, and when they have got one, scamp it.... They are mean, malicious, envious.... Charity, kindliness, generosity are qualities which they hold in contempt. They are scum." In 1970, Q. D. Leavis accused Amis of targeting as "the consistent objects of [his] animus," the "only bastions against barbarism: the university lecturer, the librarian,

the grammar school master, the learned societies, the social worker."

Despite the strong reaction of writers like Maugham, *Lucky Jim* received a largely positive response from critics. The same, however, cannot be said of much of Amis's later work, which was generally condemned as either inferior to or derivative of Amis's debut novel.

Lucky Jim Jim Dixon, the protagonist of Lucky Jim, is, according to Anthony Burgess in The Novel Now, "the most popular antihero of our time." Though a junior lecturer at a provincial university, Jim has no desire to be an intellectual—or a "gentleman"—because of his profound, almost physical, hatred of the social and cultural affectations of university life. This characteristic of Jim's has led several critics to conclude that he is a philistine, and, moreover, that beneath the comic effects, Amis was really attacking culture and was himself a philistine. Brigid Brophy, for example, wrote in Don't Never Forget: Collected Views and Reviews that the "apex of philistinism" is reached "when Jim hears a tune by the composer whom either he or Mr. Amis...thinks of as 'filthy Mozart."

Ralph Caplan, however, claimed in Charles Shapiro's *Contemporary British Novelists* that *Lucky Jim* "never [promises] anything more than unmitigated pleasure and insight, and these it keeps on delivering. The book [is] not promise but fulfillment, a commodity we confront too seldom to know how to behave when it is achieved. This seems to be true particularly when the achievement is comic. Have we forgotten how to take humor straight? Unable to exit laughing, the contemporary reader looks over his shoulder for Something More. The trouble is that by now he knows how to find it."

More of the Same? Critics generally saw the three novels that followed Lucky Jim as variations on the theme of appealing to common sense and denouncing affectation. Discussing Lucky Jim, That Uncertain Feeling, I Like It Here, and Take a Girl Like You in the Hudson Review, James P. Degnan stated: "In the comically outraged voice of his angry young heroes—e.g., Jim Dixon of Lucky Jim and John Lewis of That Uncertain Feeling—Amis [lampoons] what C. P. Snow...labeled the 'traditional culture,' the 'culture of the literary intellectuals,' of the 'gentleman's world."

The heroes in these four novels are in fact so much alike that Brigid Brophy charged Amis with "rewriting much the same novel under different titles and with different names for the characters." Degnan, however, defends the similarity: "In place of the sensitive soul as hero, Amis creates in his early novels a hero radically new to serious contemporary fiction: a middle-class hero who is also an intellectual, an intellectual who is unabashedly middle-brow. He is a hero...whose chief virtues, as he expresses them, are: 'politeness, friendly interest, ordinary concern

and a good natured willingness to be imposed upon....' Suspicious of all pretentiousness, of all heroic posturing, the Amis hero...voices all that is best of the 'lower middle-class, of the non-gentlemanly' conscience."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Research the word *cynic*. Based on your experience with Amis's work, especially *Lucky Jim*, do you think that Amis can accurately be described as a cynic? Explain your thinking in a short essay.
- 2. Compare Amis's representation of Jim Dixon with Dostoyevsky's representation of Raskolnikov. What do you see as some of the differences and similarities between these two antiheroes? Consider their backgrounds, social status, and motivations. Based on these readings, what do you make of antiheroes in novels? (What is appealing about them, what is not?)
- 3. The concept of the antihero can be extended into other areas of the creative arts, such as in music and art itself. What could that type of antihero represent? What would the profile be like? Provide contemporary examples of the antihero in each area of the arts. Support your examples.

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Mulk Raj Anand

BORN: 1905, Peshawar, India DIED: 2004, Pune, India NATIONALITY: Indian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Untouchable (1935)

The Coolie (1936)

Across the Black Waters (1940)

Overview

Throughout his novels and nonfiction writing, Mulk Raj Anand chronicled the life of early- and mid-twentieth-century India and acted as a spokesman not only for the downtrodden, but also for a new social order that would grant equal opportunity to all.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Embraced Nationalist Beliefs Anand was born in Peshawar, Punjab, India, on December 12, 1905, to Lal Chand (a coppersmith and soldier in the British Indian army) and Ishwar (Kaur) Anand. In India, a caste system had been in place for several thousand years until the beginnings of its demise in the mid-twentieth century. A caste system is a somewhat hierarchical social order with social, economic, and religious distinctions, and a person is born into a particular caste and remains in the caste until death. Anand's family was part of the Kshatriya caste, second in rank and social prestige only to the highest-ranking Brahmans. Anand attended the University of Punjab, where he graduated with honors in 1924. While a student, he became actively involved in the Indian nationalist concerns, as the country sought its independence from its longtime colonial ruler, Great Britain.

Influenced by European Experiences Anand enrolled at the University of London in 1925 for a doctoral degree in philosophy. By the time he completed his studies in 1935, he had developed intimate relationships with prominent English writers and critics. Anand's deep immersion in European intellectual thought and his direct involvement in English politics helped him to understand the British mindset, especially in relation to its response to India's nationalistic desires. Afterward, Anand studied at Cambridge University, then fought against the fascists in the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s. He was one of many foreigners who went to Spain to fight the fascists led by General Francisco Franco, but Franco remained in power there for the next four decades. However, Anand's fight against fascism likely influenced his later work.

Addressed Societal Wrongs in Early Novels Returning to Great Britain after his time in Spain, Anand would remain there for much of the next decade as he launched

his writing career. As a writer Anand's career can be divided into two stages parallel to Indian history: the Anand of the colonial period, who steadily critiqued class exploitation, the caste system, colonialism, imperialism, fascism, and racism; and the Anand of the postindependence era, who spread his energies and interests into several directions that became available with the new aspirations of India as an independent state.

Untouchable (1935) was Anand's first novel. Someone who is "untouchable" in traditional Indian society is at the bottom of the caste system of social classes and is restricted from interacting with people of higher castes. Anand's novel portrays Bakha, an untouchable, as a true human being. This novel set the stage for the type of social protest writing for which Anand would become famous. The book stems largely from a childhood incident in which an injured Anand was carried back to his house by an untouchable, only to watch his mother reprimand the untouchable for laying his hands upon her son.

Next came *The Coolie* (1936), then *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937). The former condemned capitalism, while the latter was about exploitation of Indian workers by a Britishowned tea company. These novels depicted India's underclass as Anand witnessed it, without giving them much hope.

Continued Focus on India As Britain became engulfed in World War II, Anand was employed by the BBC's film division in London from 1939 to 1945. He worked as a broadcaster and scriptwriter, while continuing to work on his own novels, which remained focused on India's ongoing internal struggles. In 1939, Anand also married his first wife, Kathleen Van Gelder, an actress.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Anand wrote his Village trilogy: The Village (1939), Across the Black Waters (1940), and The Sword and the Sickle (1942). These novels deal with the three stages of growth of Lal Singh, a peasant's son, as he struggles against the societal forces keeping him pinned at the bottom of Indian society in the midst of the stormy struggle for India's independence and the various sociopolitical events that faced Europe in the 1930s and 1940s.

Embraced Civil Disobedience In 1942, Anand became enthralled with Mohandas Gandhi's Quit India movement, a call for mass civil disobedience against the British colonizers and their government. His next novel, The Big Heart (1944), again touched on the tensions in India. It portrays laborers from the community of coppersmiths who are threatened with displacement from their hereditary profession. It also replicates the fierce conflict that took place in Europe between modernity and tradition.

Returned to India After World War II ended, Anand journeyed back to India in 1946 and remained there for several decades. While working on his writing, he also was a lecturer at various Indian universities from 1948 until the late 1960s. Anand wrote *Private Life of an Indian Prince* in 1948, the year India gained independence from Britain and

started a trend. India was one of the first of many Asian and African colonies to gain its independence from European colonizers in the years after World War II. This novel, published in 1953, chronicled one prince's experience at having his kingdom absorbed into the Indian Union.

Focused on Self in Autobiographical Novels Anand's personal life was also being transformed as India worked through its early days of independence. He divorced his first wife in 1948 and married Shirin Vajifdar, a classical dancer, in 1949. Anand's life also became the focus of his writings. The first of a seven-title autobiographical novel series called "Seven Ages of Man," a novel about Anand's childhood entitled Seven Summers (1951), was not published in the United States until 1973. Of the planned seven novels, Anand completed four.

Over the years, Anand was lauded for his work as he affected change in India through his writings and employment. Anand died of pneumonia in Pune, India, on September 28, 2004, at the age of ninety-nine.

Works in Literary Context

Rejecting the ideas of disinterestedness and escapism in art and aloofness and alienation of the artist in society, Anand boldly embraced British poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's idea of the poet as the "unacknowledged legislator of mankind." Believing in the whole man and in his ability to reconstruct a new, progressive social order, and admiring the humanity of Mohandas Gandhi, poet and musician Rabindranath Tagore, and philosopher and politician Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Anand stressed the recognition of human dignity as a directional force in human relationships as well as the importance of hope and realism in his works.

Humanism One of Anand's key themes in his work is the idea that all people are deserving of dignity and basic liberties. This reflects the concept of humanism, or the belief that all people—regardless of culture or social class—are capable of operating by a universal moral code in which all are treated equally. This point of view is expressed in his sympathetic portrayal of Bakha in Untouchable, as well as his depiction of coppersmiths in The Big Heart. Anand counted on the humanistic notion that people of all cultures could relate to universal ideas about fairness and equality in his work.

Hope and Realism Hope and realism are elements introduced in Anand's Village trilogy. The Village is a realistic portrayal of village life. Across the Black Waters is a representation of Lal Singh and his friends' experiences of fighting against the Germans in France during World War I. The first and only fictional account of the use of Indian troops in World War I, the story raises the moral issue of the deployment of Indian troops in a British war and reflects Anand's own experiences fighting against fascists in the Spanish Civil War. The Sword and the Sickle is a sociopolitical novel that combines two major con-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Anand's famous contemporaries include:

- **B. R. Ambedkar** (1891–1956): Born into the untouchable caste, Ambedkar fought against the caste system; he became a well-respected lawyer and helped draw up the Indian Constitution.
- **E. M. Forster** (1879–1970): English writer and member of the Bloomsbury literary group in London who wrote the introduction to *Untouchable*; his novel *A Passage to India* was one of the first to address British mistreatment of Indians under colonial rule.

Indira Gandhi (1917–1984): Prime minister of India for four terms (1966–1977, 1980–1984); assassinated while in office by two bodyguards, who were political radicals.

Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948): Indian political leader and a key leader of the Indian independence movement, famous for his philosophy of nonviolent resistance; assassinated by Hindu extremists.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964): First prime minister of India after its independence from Great Britain, from 1947–1964, and father of Indira Gandhi; worked closely with Mohandas Gandhi during the Indian independence movement.

cerns: the social problem of the eviction of peasants by landlords, and the political problem of national freedom.

Through his writings, Anand helped establish the basic forms and themes of Indian literature written in English. Because of his subject matter and realism, especially in his early novels, many critics believe that his influence on contemporary South Asian literature is similar to that of nineteenth-century novelists Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola on European letters of the time.

Works in Critical Context

Most critics agree that Mulk Raj Anand is among India's foremost writers. His depictions of the underclass ring true, as do his other portrayals of Indian people. "Anand's achievement in the first two novels of the *Trilogy*," remarks Meenakshi Mukherjee, "has not been surpassed by an Indo-Anglican novelist."

However, Anand has been faulted for his shallow descriptions of others, notably the British. Anand also has been criticized for being too propagandist in his calls for social equality via Marxism. Most critics concede that both the characterizations in Anand's later works and his social statements are more evenlanded than those of his earlier ones.

Untouchable Anand earned high praise for his first novel, Untouchable, upon its publication in 1935. Novelist E. M. Forster, in his foreword for the book, writes,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Mulk Raj Anand was a progressive and unswerving advocate of those at the bottom of society—the oppressed, the victimized, and the dispossessed. Here are some other works that advocate for those who are often ignored:

A Child Called "It" (1995), by Dave Pelzer. This nonfiction memoir tells of the author's surviving a childhood of abuse by his alcoholic mother.

Nervous Conditions (2004), by Tsitsi Dangarembga. This novel, set in 1960s Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), follows an African girl as she grows up and struggles with traditional women's roles and traditional culture versus Western culture. It was the first English-language novel published by a black Zimbabwean woman.

Oliver Twist (1838), by Charles Dickens. In this novel, an orphan boy must try to survive on his own in Victorian London and gets involved with a group of criminals.

Woman at Point Zero (1979), by Nawal El Saadawi. This novel by the Egyptian feminist and physician tells of the life of an Egyptian prostitute who is in jail for murder.

"I Am Joaquin" (1967), by Rodolfo Gonzales. This epic poem by the influential Mexican American political activist calls for a new understanding of what "Chicano" means.

"Avoiding rhetoric and circumlocution, it has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it." Saros Cowasjee, in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, writes: "The novel is not only a powerful social tract but also a remarkable technical feat. The action takes place within the compass of a single day, but the author manages to build round his hero Bakha...a spiritual crisis of such breadth that it seems to embrace the whole of India."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Read Anand's novel *Untouchable*. What are some techniques he uses to depict the squalid and unfair conditions in which Bakha lives and works? In your opinion, are these effective techniques? Provide examples from the text.
- 2. Though Anand was a supporter of basic human rights for all, he was a member of a relatively high social class by birth. Do you think Anand could have published *Untouchable* if he actually was an untouchable in Indian society? Do you think his experience as a member of a higher social class influenced his ability to write objectively about those living in the lower classes?
- 3. Compare Anand's *Untouchable* to E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India*. How do the two books

- portray Indian society differently? Provide examples from each book to illustrate your points.
- 4. India's caste system is less enforced today than in the past, but it still makes itself felt. Using the Internet and your library's resources, research the Indian caste system and write an essay comparing and contrasting it to racial segregation in the United States before the civil rights movement. Be sure to use specific examples in your essay.

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Hans Christian Andersen

BORN: 1805, Odense, Denmark

DIED: 1875, Rolighed, Denmark

NATIONALITY: Danish

GENRE: Children's literature, fiction, drama

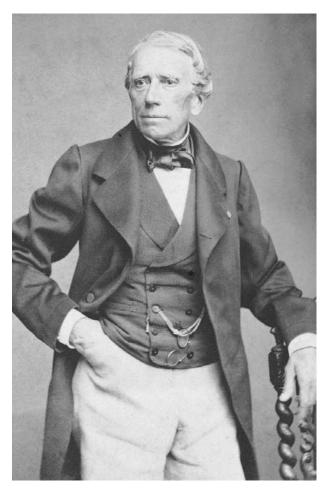
MAJOR WORKS:

"The Little Mermaid" (1837)

"The Emperor's New Clothes" (1837)

"The Ugly Duckling" (1843)

"The Snow Queen" (1845)



Hans Christian Andersen Imagno / Getty Images

Overview

Danish author Hans Christian Andersen is perhaps the foremost writer of fairy tales in world literature. Known for such stories as "The Little Mermaid," "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," and "The Ugly Duckling," he expanded the scope of the fairy tale genre by creating original stories drawn from a wealth of folklore and personal experience.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Impoverished Childhood Enhanced by Imagination The story of Andersen's life is one of unparalleled social and artistic success, rising as he did from the lowest and poorest layer of society to achieve not only the acceptance but the utter devotion of the highest social groups, the artistic elite and royal houses of many European countries. Outwardly, his story was a tremendous success, but he achieved it at great personal and psychological cost.

Andersen's childhood experiences greatly influenced his literary perspective and are reflected in his fairy tales.

He was born in Odense, Denmark, to a poor shoemaker and his superstitious, uneducated wife. Andersen's father, in keeping with the spirit of the eighteenth century, declared himself to be a freethinker and, much to his wife's dismay, insisted on regarding Jesus as a great man but not the son of God. As an adult, his son also accepted this understanding of who Jesus was.

Andersen's father did not enjoy being a cobbler and encouraged his son to aspire to a better life by telling him glamorous stories about the theater and opera and by sending him to school at an early age. The elder Andersen also encouraged his son's vivid imagination, reading to the boy from the comedies of Ludvig Holberg, *The Arabian Nights*, and the fairy tales of Jean de La Fontaine. He also built his son a puppet theater. Andersen was a shy child so instead of playing with other children, he wrote puppet dramas and designed costumes for his characters.

Lost Father Amidst Tumultuous Era in Danish History Andersen's father died in 1816, before the boy turned eleven, two years after serving as a soldier. At the time, Denmark was involved in the Napoleonic Wars, siding with the French led by Napoleon Bonaparte against various European countries including Great Britain. In 1801 and again in 1807, Copenhagen came under British attack. In the second, decisive battle, the English armada shelled Copenhagen and captured the Danish navy, thus ending a half century of progress and middleclass prosperity built on overseas trade. As a result of the wars, Andersen's childhood years were marked by great catastrophes in Denmark and the beginning of a lengthy economic recession. Oddly enough, however, this period was followed by a cultural explosion known as the Golden Age of Denmark—an age in which Andersen figured prominently.

Encouraged as a Writer In 1819, three years after his father's death, Andersen moved to Copenhagen to pursue an acting career. As a young boy without references, he was denied admittance to the Royal Theater and was rejected by Copenhagen's opera company. However, Jonas Collin, a director of the Royal Theater, was impressed by the promise Andersen showed as a writer. Collin took Andersen into his home, sent him to grammar school, and supported him until he passed the entrance exams to the University of Copenhagen. He was Andersen's confidant, critic, and friend, and Andersen remained closely connected to the Collin family throughout his life.

Andersen began writing in the 1830s. Thanks to the enthusiastic response to his work, the author received a government grant with a yearly stipend. The grant, combined with the earnings from his writings, gave him a solid financial basis, and his income grew steadily during the following years. As he began writing his fairy tales, he drew on the fantasy world he created as a child to deal with his difficult childhood and early adulthood.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Hans Christian Andersen's famous contemporaries include:

Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881): English politician and novelist. Disraeli was prime minister twice, overseeing Britain's colonization of India. He also found time to write ten novels and numerous nonfiction works.

John Quincy Adams (1767–1848): Sixth president of the United States. He was most effective as a politician and diplomat before and after his presidency. Adams secured Florida from Spanish rule and he promoted the Monroe Doctrine, which was designed to keep Europe from colonizing or interfering with any more territory in the Americas.

Emma Lazarus (1849–1887): American poet most famous for her poem "The New Colossus," inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"

George du Maurier (1834–1896): English novelist and illustrator. Du Maurier's novels, including his famous *Trilby*, are social satires that are often based on his time as an art student in Paris. Du Maurier illustrated many of the most popular novels of his day and drew famous caricatures in *Punch* magazine.

Wilhelm Raabe (1831–1910): German novelist noted for his pessimistic realism and bitter irony. His later novels are highly experimental in their time structures and narrative.

Josh Billings (1818–1885): American auctioneer, real estate agent, and essayist. His humorous writings used deliberately bad spelling and grammar, and his numerous collections of sayings and observations were popular throughout the century.

Found Success with Fairy Tales In 1839, Andersen's fairy tales began appearing in German translations, and their popularity among readers was quickly ensured. Throughout the 1840s, Andersen's reputation in Europe grew rapidly and he traveled extensively. By 1843, when he made a trip that took him to Germany, Belgium, and France, Andersen was able to enjoy his celebrity. He also consorted on equal footing with such writers and artists as Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Alphonse de Lamartine, Henrick Heine (exiled by then), and sculptor Pierre-Jean David in Paris. While Andersen's career soared, Denmark edged closer to war and eventually became engulfed in the Three Years' War (1848–1851), a conflict between the Danes and the German duchies of Schleswig and Holstein over who should control the duchies.

During this time period, Andersen's fairy tales were no longer labeled "for children" and he was fully in control of his narrative form. He published such beloved stories as "The Ugly Duckling" in 1843 and "The Snow Queen" in 1845, and, by the end of the decade, his collected works began appearing in German. A similar edition in Danish would appear in the early 1850s. Andersen also published the first illustrated book in Denmark in 1849, a collection of his fairy tales with drawings by Vilhelm Pedersen. In addition, Andersen published his autobiography, *The True Story of My Life*, in 1847, and another novel, *The Two Baronesses*, in 1848.

Shades of Real Life in Best-Loved Stories Of all his stories, Andersen's semiautobiographical sketches are considered his most enduring. Stories like "The Little Mermaid," "The Nightingale," and "The Steadfast Tin Soldier" reflect in part Andersen's own unrequited love affairs in varying degrees of melancholy and satire. "The Ugly Duckling," the story of a homely cygnet who becomes the most beautiful of all swans, is probably Andersen's best-loved and most popular work of this type. Just as the snubbed duckling becomes a beautiful swan, so did the lonely cobbler's son become the pride of Denmark and its international literary representative.

More Open Society After the death of Danish King Christian VIII in 1848, Denmark abolished absolute rule and adopted a constitution in 1849. A new era in Danish history was dawning, which included more modernization and openness, and it affected what Andersen wrote. He became the "house playwright" at the new Casino theater in Copenhagen—the first private theater in the city—and saw a number of his plays staged there in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Andersen also published a poetic travel book, Pictures of Sweden (1851), as well as more fairy tales. After 1855 and until he stopped publishing in the early 1870s, however, he insisted on calling his fairy tales "stories" as well to distance them from the fairy tale genre and its link to Romanticism. His later, often more experimental, tales included "The Auntie Toothache" (1872) and "The Flea and the Professor" (1873).

Resided with Melchior Family Until End of Life After an illness, Andersen died in August 1875 at the summer residence of the wealthy Melchior family. The estate, known as Rolighed (Tranquility), was located in Osterbro, which is today part of Copenhagen. For many years, Andersen had been a permanent guest of the Melchiors. The cause of death was determined to be liver cancer.

Works in Literary Context

During his lifetime, Andersen was well-known in both Europe and the United States for his novels, fairy tales, and stories, as well as for his literary travel books and autobiography. Today, he is known the world over for his fairy tales, which are particularly popular in China and Japan, and many of his works have been translated into more than 150 languages. Nevertheless, his worldwide

acclaim is based largely on the mistaken perception that he is primarily a children's author. Many people now find it surprising that Andersen was recognized by his contemporaries as an author of adult fiction, with an adult sensibility inherent in his fairy tales and stories.

Melding the Supernatural and the Realistic Andersen himself divided his original tales into two distinct classes: "eventyr" and "historier." The "eventyr" are fairy tales in which a supernatural element contributes to the outcome of the narrative. "The Little Mermaid," for example, is set in a kingdom beneath the sea and tells the story of a mermaid who drinks a magical potion brewed by a sea witch in hopes that she will be metamorphosed into a human.

Andersen's "historier" are stories that do not employ a supernatural element. Frequently, the "historier" starkly portray poverty and suffering, leaving readers disturbed when good is not necessarily rewarded at a story's conclusion. The "historier" also often reveal their author's strong moral and religious attitudes: Andersen had a childlike faith in God and perceived death as a reward for a difficult life.

This perception is perhaps most vividly portrayed in "The Little Match Girl," a grim story in which an impoverished child dies from exposure on Christmas Eve when no one will buy her matches. The child is finally freed from her suffering when her deceased grandmother arrives to lead her to heaven. Although many of Andersen's "historier" and fairy tales end unhappily, most critics concur that his underlying attitude in his stories is positive.

Traditional Folktale Influences Andersen won a place in the literary world because he revitalized children's literature by creating a fairy-tale form and narrative style that was all his own, but there were many forerunners to the fairy-tale side of his literary production. The long tradition of folktales includes A Thousand and One Nights (first mentioned in the ninth century), which stood on the bookshelf of his impoverished childhood home. Andersen also heard folktales recounted by the poor women of Odense and he later renewed acquaintance with these stories by reading Child and Household Tales (1812–1815) by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. In addition, Andersen was influenced by German and Danish folktale writers such as Ludwig Tieck, E. T. A. Hoffman, and B. S. Ingemann.

But unlike so many other folktale authors, Andersen's deeply original style was fully developed from the start. While the Grimm brothers (Jacob and Wilhelm) refined and polished the folktales they had collected to achieve a normalized prose style without any particularly significant characteristics, Andersen took the opposite approach. He created a style and narrative voice that largely stayed close to colloquial speech and thus held a lively appeal for children (though he was never writing exclusively for them). His groundbreaking contribution is

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Children's tales from times past are often more disturbing, violent, or horrific than their modern equivalents. They were created largely as cautionary tales, meant to provide lessons to young readers about how to behave properly. Here are some other works that focus on lessons for children:

Slovenly Peter (1845) by Heinrich Hoffmann. This collection of tales instructs children in the punishments that await improper behavior; in one, for example, a girl named Pauline plays with matches and ends up burning to death.

The Adventures of Pinocchio (1883) by Carlo Collodi. This novel about the virtues of telling the truth is far darker than modern adaptations. The kind Blue Fairy of the Disney version is the ghost of a dead child in the original, and early in the book Pinocchio smashes the Talking Cricket with a hammer and kills it.

Tales of Mother Goose (1697) by Charles Perrault. French author Perrault's book, filled with moral tales intended for children, includes many of the most enduring fairy tales of our time, such as "Cinderella," "Sleeping Beauty," and "Little Red Riding Hood." However, the level of violence in these stories is not downplayed as it is in more modern adaptations.

that he neither addresses children as adults nor talks down to them, as was the custom in literature at the time. On principle, he chose his perspective from below, from the children's level, and thereby seemed to show a solidarity with his audience.

Works in Critical Context

In general, Andersen's works have been consistently well received. Georg Brandes, one of the first prominent critics to recognize Andersen's literary significance, especially commended Andersen's use of conversational language, which he claimed distinguished the author from other children's writers and prevented his stories from becoming outdated. Later, such Danish critics as Elias Bredsdorff and Erik Haugaard praised the uncluttered structure of Andersen's tales. Some twentieth-century commentators have considered Andersen's work maudlin and overly disturbing for small children. Nevertheless, he is usually recognized as a consummate storyteller who distilled his vision of humanity into a simple format that has proved universally popular.

Fairy Tales By 1835, when his Fairy Tales (Eventyr in Danish) was published, Andersen was well-known in Denmark for other travel books, plays, and a novel, The

Improvisatore; or, Life in Italy (1845). However, early critical reception of Fairy Tales was generally negative. At first, Andersen agreed with his detractors, calling his tales smaating, or trifles. However, he soon realized that these short works were the perfect outlet for his messages to the world, so he continued to write stories in this vein. Andersen also discovered that his tales commanded his greatest audience and could bring him the international fame he craved. His popularity increased in Europe and America, and he traveled extensively throughout Germany, Holland, and England.

As well-known as he was around the world, critics in Denmark often did not recognize or acknowledge Andersen's talent. Both those who addressed him in private and those who wrote publicly failed to see the originality of his language and often reproached him for not being able to write "proper Danish." They attributed his inability to his having so much faith in his own talent that he did not wish to submit to any kind of serious studies or to learn from the great classical authors. Even his old friend Edvard Collin, who assisted him by copying out and proofing his manuscripts, repeated the criticism in the book he published after the author's death, *Hans Christian Andersen and the Collin Family* (1882). He also stated that Andersen regrettably lacked the desire or ability for any kind of rigorous study.

Responses to Literature

- Andersen's critics often stated that his work was not sophisticated enough to reach the level of art. Yet his work was and is very popular with readers around the world, especially children. What do you think are the most important characteristics that identify a work of literature as art? Using these criteria, do Hans Christian Andersen's tales qualify as art?
- 2. Read Andersen's first published story, "The Tinder Box." How is his upbringing and cultural background reflected in this story? In what ways is the author's young life similar to the soldier's life in his story?
- 3. Like many tales for children, Andersen's stories usually contain an instructional message for readers meant to help them lead successful lives. These are similar to the "morals" found at the end of Aesop's fables but may not be stated as explicitly. Pick one of Andersen's fairy tales and explain the message or messages found within it. Provide specific details from the story to support your explanation.
- 4. Select one of the many retellings, edited versions, or dramatizations of Andersen's stories and compare it carefully to the original. What do the changes reveal about the difference between our time and place and Andersen's? What do they reveal about the changing concepts of children?

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■ Ivo Andric

BORN: 1892, Dolac, Bosnia

DIED: 1975, Belgrade, Yugoslavia (now Serbia)

NATIONALITY: Croatian, Yugoslavian

GENRE: Fiction
MAJOR WORKS:

The Bridge on the Drina (1945)
The Woman from Sarajevo (1945)
"The Vizier's Elephant," (1947)
The Damned Yard (1954)

Overview

Ivo Andric's international importance as a major twentieth-century European writer was acknowledged in 1961, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Andric focuses his attention on his native Bosnia because it represents a particularly varied concentration of Eastern and Western cultures: Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians, a large Muslim community, Jews, and gypsies. Andric's lifetime covers a period of exceptional violence in Europe. While this experience is implicit in his works, it is not often treated directly.



Ivo Andric Andric, Ivo, photograph. AP Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up Poor in Bosnia Ivo Andric was born Ivan Andric on October 9, 1892, in Dolac, a small town in central Bosnia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His parents were Ivan Antun Andric, a coppersmith, and Katarina Andric, both Catholics. The family moved to Sarajevo soon after Andric's birth. When his father died of tuberculosis in 1894, his impoverished mother moved with her only child to Visegrad, a town on the Drina River. Andric completed elementary school in Visegrad and high school in Sarajevo. He attended universities in Zagreb in Croatia, Vienna in Austria, and Kraków in Poland, where he began publishing poetry. He took part in radical nationalistic activities, and one of his acquaintances was Gavrilo Princip, who was to fire the shots that killed Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo in 1914, sparking World War I.

Imprisonment, Illness, and Commitment to Writing Andric was arrested by the Austrians in 1914 as a member of the revolutionary group Young Bosnia, which favored an independent Slavic state, and spent three years in prison. While in prison Andric realized that he should express his commitment to political, moral, and social issues through his writing. He was released in 1917

because of poor health and a lack of evidence against him. In prison he wrote his first work, a book of prose poems titled *Ex Ponto* (1918, From the Bridge), followed two years later by a similar volume, *Nemiri* (1919, Unrest).

After his release from prison, Andric went to Zagreb. He was seriously ill and spent long spells in the hospital, but with the end of World War I he shared in the euphoria of the creation of Yugoslavia, the new "Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes," as it was called. In 1920 he entered the diplomatic service, and was posted to several European cities over the course of his career in Italy, Hungary, France, and Spain.

Prizewinning Short Stories In his first short story, "The Journey of Ali Djerzelez" (1920; first English publication, 1968), Andric raises the question of the meaning of human existence amid evil and suffering, a theme that he repeats in many of his works. A legendary Bosnian figure and a hero of popular Muslim ballads, Alija moves between reality and dream, action and futility. Andric's Pripovetke (Short Stories), his first collections, published in 1924, 1931, and 1936, were awarded prizes.

Increased Literary Output during World War II When World War II began, Andric was an ambassador in Berlin. Because he disagreed with the Yugoslav government's decision to join Adolf Hitler's tripartite pact—an alliance between Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, and Fascist Italy—he resigned in March of 1941, ending his diplomatic career. Hitler invaded and captured Yugoslavia in less than two weeks. Andric spent the entire Nazi occupation in Belgrade, Yugoslavia (today Serbia). These four years, despite the surrounding death and destruction, were the most productive in Andric's literary career. He completed three novels and published them in 1945, the first postwar Yugoslav publications after the victory over the Germans.

The best known of these novels, *The Bridge on the Drina* (1945), brings together several individual stories set in Visegrad, his childhood home, to give a chronicle of certain periods of the town's history, linked by the central symbol of the bridge. Perhaps his most important work, it is an encompassing saga covering the history of Bosnia between 1566 and 1914. However, Andric wrote the novel not as history but as a chronicle of life in Bosnia and of characters of several generations.

While *The Bridge on the Drina* takes a broad view of the life of a community through time, *Bosnian Story* (1948) (also known as *Bosnian Chronicle* and *The Days of the Consuls*) focus on a seven-year period in the history of the town of Travnik, the seat of the vizier in Bosnia, where French and Austrian consuls served from 1807 to 1814. This novel emphasizes the divisions between sections of the community: Muslims, Christians (Catholic and Orthodox), and Jews. Self-imposed isolation is the subject of Andric's

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Andric's famous contemporaries include:

Haile Selassie (1892–1975): Emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974; widely credited with establishing a stable modern state, Selassie died in unclear circumstances while under house arrest after being overthrown by a military coup.

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950): American poet and the first woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry; well known for her lyrical poetic style and unconventional life.

Josip Tito (1892–1980): Leader of Yugoslavia from 1944 until his death, after being named President for Life in the 1974 constitution; a Communist, he was instrumental in the revolt against Nazi rule that began in 1941.

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973): English writer, poet, and Anglo-Saxon scholar best known for *The Hobbit* and his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy of fantasy novels.

Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941): Highly respected Russian poet known for her lyric and narrative work.

third wartime novel, *The Woman from Sarajevo* (1945); it is the portrait of a miser dedicated with religious zeal to her obsession with saving and mending.

Postwar Work In Andric's novella *The Damned Yard* (1954), the prison yard suggests that the only escape from the constraints imposed by society and circumstances of birth is through the imagination, the deep human need for stories and storytelling. It provides the capacity to formulate experience, to connect with other peoples and generations in order to begin to understand one's life. This is considered one of the best of his post–World War II works.

Achieving International Recognition With the end of World War II and the Communists' successful revolution, the second, socialist Yugoslavia came into being. Andric participated fully in the intellectual and cultural life of his country, accepting various public positions and devoting himself especially to improving educational opportunities for all. Winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961 had an enormous effect upon Andric the man and the artist. As he was the only South Slav writer to have received this prestigious award, it was highly gratifying for him. The outpouring of congratulations and respect attested that he now truly belonged to world literature.

Andric continued to work until 1974, when he became seriously ill. He died, after a long struggle, on March 13, 1975. His funeral was attended by some ten thousand citizens of Belgrade.

Works in Literary Context

Parallels have been drawn between Andric's work and that of Thomas Mann, Joseph Conrad, and Henry James. He was an avid reader and himself spoke of a sense of affinity with a wide variety of writers from Albert Camus and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to Marcus Aurelius.

The Individual Amid the Epic The epic proportions of The Bridge on the Drina prompted many critics to liken Ivo Andric to Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy. Like Tolstoy, Andric was concerned with the inevitable flow of history, with the precedence that events take over the individual. Andric has been compared to American novelist Herman Melville. Stoyan Christowe demonstrated that the elephant in the novella The Vizier's Elephant was similar to Melville's fictional whale, Moby Dick, because "both personify the universal, hostile forces against which man struggles."

History and the Redemptive Imagination A key aspect of Andric's work is the portrayal of history as a dimension of human life. He confronts the conflict, brutality, and hatred that may be seen as particularly concentrated and close to the surface in his native Bosnia in order to expose universal patterns of experience. But individual experience is always counterbalanced by further examples, so that the picture emerging from Andric's work as a whole is subtle and complex. His constant journeys into the past do not signify an escape from the present reality but rather a keen understanding of the unity of time and space in the history of the Bosnian people.

In his Nobel Prize banquet speech he commented that "the storyteller and his work serve no purpose unless they serve, in one way or another, man and humanity." These words sum up Andric's philosophy concerning his literary output. It can be safely said that he has fulfilled his mission of a witness to the existence and history of his country, small by space and numbers, but important to Andric within his artistic vision.

Works in Critical Context

When Andric received the Nobel Prize, the citation praised "the epic force with which he has traced themes and depicted human destinies from his country's history."

"For Andric, man, set against the vast panorama of history, is insignificant—fearful of external disaster and inwardly aware of his own insecurity in a world where everything is ephemeral, however much he may long for constancy," Konstantin Bazarov explains in *Books and Bookmen*. "The particular history of old Turkish Bosnia, with its despotism and violence, thus portrays the broader theme of man's tragic struggle against the oncoming darkness of change and death."

The Bridge on the Drina When The Bridge on the Drina was published in 1945, critics praised the novel for its epic scope and historical richness. This book in particular led to Andric's being compared to writers like Leo Tolstoy and Herman Melville, and played a key role in his being awarded the Nobel Prize. Although the book did not achieve great fame in translated English editions, it remained highly regarded by critics and scholars for several decades. In the 1990s, increased tensions in the Balkans brought a renewed interest in the book, which offers a sweeping history of the region even though it focuses on a single bridge. As a reviewer for The Economist wrote in 1994, "Why are the Balkans such a tinder box? A great novel can be of some assistance in answering such questions, by communicating truths through fiction—or by a skilful mingling of fact and fiction." James Martin, reexamining the novel for America in 1995, states, "At the heart of the narrative is a clear polemic against the greatest evil in Andric's eyes, regardless of religion, and in any state of war: the fear a dominating power has of its people."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Ivo Andric decided to express his social and political concerns through his writing. What can you learn about a country or region by reading its literature that you cannot learn by reading the news?
- 2. Two themes in Andric's works are the divisions between sections of the community and the self-imposed isolation of different groups. The United States has been called a "melting pot" of different cultures, in which immigrants become essentially American. It has also been called a "salad bowl," in which immigrants keep parts of their original culture. Which do you think is preferable? Why?
- 3. Andric's writings explore the rich cultural heritage of his native country, which became Yugoslavia after World War I. However, a bitter civil war ripped apart the country along ethnic lines in the 1980s and 1990s, and today it has split into six separate nations. Write an essay analyzing the following quote by George Santayana, the Spanish philosopher: "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it." How does that quote relate to Andric's reasons for writing about Bosnia and its history?
- 4. Andric believed that imagination allows us to connect with other people and the past in order to start understanding our own life. Write an essay about your family history. How has it shaped your own personality and way of thinking? Be sure to use specific examples.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Ivo Andric lived and worked in a rich literary tradition that is not familiar to many American readers. Here are some works by other writers from the region formerly known as Yugoslavia.

The Mountain Wreath (1847), a play by Prince-Bishop Petar II. This long poem in the form of a play by the Montenegrin politician and poet is based on true events in the previous century, when converts to Islam were given the choice of converting back to Christianity or being killed.

On the Edge of Reason (1938), a novel by Miroslav Krzela. This novel by the great Croatian writer and poet satirizes enforced conformity by exploring the disastrous consequences of an honest opinion blurted out by a model citizen.

Death and the Dervish (1966), a novel by Mesa Selimovic. This novel, by a writer who identified himself as both Bosnian and Serbian and came from a Muslim family, is set during Bosnia's occupation by the Ottoman Empire and explores the interior world of a dervish, or Islamic religious man, who is tormented by his brother's arrest.

Dictionary of the Khazars: A Lexicon Novel (1988), a novel by Milorad Pavic. This contemporary Serbian novel is styled as three cross-referenced encyclopedias (Christian, Muslim, and Jewish), which through interconnected and sometimes contradictory stories explore the conversion to Judaism of much of the Khazar people in the late eighth century; it is available in a "female" and a "male" edition, which are identical except for one paragraph.

Songs of the Serbian People (1997), a nonfiction work by Vuk Karadzic. Karadzic, a nineteenth-century Serbian linguist, collected traditional folk songs, of which selected ones are translated and explored in this edition.

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■ Jean Anouilh

BORN: 1910, Cérisole, France DIED: 1987, Lausanne, Switzerland

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: *Plays*MAJOR WORKS:

Traveler without Luggage (1937)

Thieves' Carnival (1938)

Antigone (1942)

Invitation to the House (1947)

The Waltz of the Toreadors (1952)

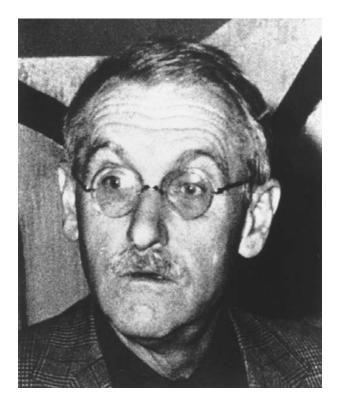
The Navel (1981)

Overview

French playwright Jean Anouilh was an accomplished craftsman. Considered among the most important and influential twentieth-century French dramatists, he had a life and approach to literature that were both far from ordinary. While most French dramatists of the 1930s and 1940s not only wrote for the stage but also composed poetry, novels, or essays, Anouilh concentrated exclusively on writing for the stage. Among Anouilh's other distinguishing features are his claims that he was apolitical and the fact that he rarely commented formally on his work. Dedicated neither to philosophical elaborations nor to theorization about drama, he instead labored over the exact wording, gestures, and situations of his characters.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Call of the Theater Jean Anouilh was born in Cérisole, near Bordeaux, on June 23, 1910. His father, a



Jean Anouilh Anouilh, Jean, 1971, photograph. AP Images.

tailor, and his mother, a violinist in an orchestra, undoubtedly imparted their respect for craftsmanship and a love of art, which he likely adopted during the hours he spent at the theater with his mother. Anouilh received his primary and secondary education in Paris, where he later studied law for a year and a half. In 1929, he went to work in an advertising agency, where he wrote publicity and comic film scripts for two years.

From early childhood, Anouilh had been fascinated by the stage. He frequented theaters and was writing plays at the age of twelve. After a period in the military, he worked as secretary to the respected actor and director Louis Jouvet. He married Monelle Valentin, an actress who later created the roles of many of Anouilh's heroines. Like many stage-struck youths, he tended to confuse real life with the theater, which, in his early plays, led him to sacrifice substance for theatricality. Undaunted by Jouvet's lack of encouragement and by the near total failure of his first plays, he stubbornly resolved to devote his life to the theater.

With the success of *Traveler without Luggage* (*Le voyageur sans bagages*) in 1937—inspired by the true-life story of a French World War I soldier who suffered amnesia during combat—Anouilh's popularity began steadily growing over the next two decades both in France and abroad. Profoundly impressed by the plays of Jean Giraudoux and Luigi Pirandello, which broke with the tradition of the realistic theater, Anouilh recognized the value of poetry, illusion, fantasy, and irony as a means of portraying

basic truths about human life. He was convinced that the essence of the theater and its quality of make-believe mirror a person's pretense and self-delusion, a conviction that led him to exploit the artificiality of the theater in order to expose the falsity of human motives and the allegedly noblest principles and sentiments.

Antigone and the Nazi Occupation Just as Anouilh was making a name for himself in the French theater, the Nazi forces of Germany—under the command of Adolf Hitler—began to occupy the countries of western Europe, an event which led directly to World War II. The French and English both declared war against Germany after Nazi forces took control of Poland in 1939; the following year, the Nazis advanced into France, defeating the French army and taking control of most of the country. A single region of France, with Vichy as its seat, remained outside German control due to an agreement reached by the Germans and the French government; many in France viewed this as collaboration with the enemy and refused to support the Vichy regime.

Although Anouilh was not an outspoken supporter of the French Resistance to Nazi occupation, his play *Antigone* (1942) is often viewed as an allegory of the situation in France at the time. The play was performed in Paris during the occupation, and was therefore subject to approval and censorship by Nazi officials. The deliberately vague references in the play—as well as the fact that it was inspired by an ancient Greek play of the same name—are likely reasons for the play's ability to slip past Nazi censorship.

Adamant about Solitude Anouilh's constant preoccupation with the technical production of his plays gradually led him to the role of director. In this capacity he produced, along with his own works, plays in line with his own views, such as those of Molière. Completely absorbed in theater, he avoided outside involvements, choosing instead a secluded private life. His first marriage had ended painfully for him after Monelle had carried on several adulterous affairs, and it was not until 1953 that he married Charlotte Chardon, another actress.

One of his children, Catherine, also followed the theater path as an actress, starring in several of her father's productions. She would later write in her biography of her father in sympathetic terms, depicting him as a reclusive writer, and a color-blind, myopic man who never thought himself handsome. He was also, she wrote, a doting father and husband who was overly protective of his family.

A diligent worker, Anouilh labored daily at his craft on a rigid schedule. He was reluctant to travel far from home and asked his family to make necessary trips on his behalf. Catherine Anouilh writes that beyond his family life and work regimen, her father was a solitary man comfortable with only a few close friends. He was afflicted by a morbid shyness, particularly with strangers, that would bring him to the point of panic in public.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Anouilh's famous contemporaries include:

Albert Camus (1913–1960): Known best as an existential philosopher, but also associated with the Absurdist philosophy highlighted by Anouilh.

Omar Nelson Bradley (1893–1981): Bradley was an American army commander during World War II whose concern for his men led to his reputation as the "soldier's general."

Howard Hughes (1905–1976): One of the wealthiest people in the world, Hughes was, among other things, an American aviator and film producer whose mental illness led to his becoming a recluse.

Alexander Fleming (1881–1955): Scottish biologist who shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology/Medicine for his discovery of penicillin as an antibiotic.

Gloria Steinem (1934–): A writer and journalist, Steinem is an icon of American feminism and women's rights.

Even Anouilh's closest friends knew little of his personal life. Always protective of his privacy and rarely granting interviews, the mysterious playwright wrote in a 1946 letter addressed to the Belgian critic Hubert Gignoux, "I do not have a biography and I am very happy about it. The rest of my life, as long as God wills it, will remain my personal business, and I will withhold the details of it."

An Increasing Pessimism Still, Anouilh's plays provide important clues about his life and his most personal beliefs. He grouped his pieces into several categories according to their predominant tone—pinks, blacks, brilliants, jarring, costumed, or baroque. Whatever their classification, Anouilh's works all offer a unified and profound view of the human condition. His characteristic heroes are essentially rebels, revolting in the name of an inner ideal of purity against compromise with the immoral demands of family, social position, or their pasts. Yet the efforts of his early heroes to escape from reality give way in most of the later plays to a profound bitterness caused by the realization that no escape is possible.

Anouilh's only escape was when he spent time in his elegant apartments in Paris or in Pully, Switzerland, near Lausanne, where he died on October 3, 1987. Throughout his long career, his unwavering love of the stage extended to second-rate musicians and struggling actors as well as people who had his sympathy and were often portrayed in his plays. He associated such people with the plight of the masses, from the Depression era to the time of postwar poverty. Appalled by modern society's excesses and given to pessimism about the future, Anouilh had insisted on a private life where he could live according to

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

While Anouilh's style is difficult to categorize, his themes are usually recognizable, as he wrote about what affects humans at the most basic level—class division, money issues, death. Here are a few works by other writers who have explored similar subjects:

The Infernal Machine (1936), by Jean Cocteau. In this drama, the playwright turns the classic story of Oedipus into a tragi-comedy by using irony where there originally was none

No Exit (1944), by Jean-Paul Sartre. In this well-known existential play, three characters are escorted to a room on a basement floor, where they eventually realize that "Hell is other people."

True West (1980), by Sam Shepard. Dysfunctional family dynamics are played out to the hilt in this drama with a Western backdrop.

his personal code of moral values and had avoided direct involvement in the political controversies of his day. With Anouilh both inclined to let his art convey his ideas and content to relinquish his voice to actors in order to maintain his privacy, his plays themselves have become a reflection of the man who composed them. They portray heroism under difficult circumstances, insist upon the values of solidarity and courage, and, most of all, emphasize individual freedom, even against impossible odds.

Works in Literary Context

Although, as one researcher contends, Anouilh cannot be linked with any particular school or trend, and because he was so private, scholars can only surmise who or what inspired Anouilh. An early influence was his father, who instilled in his son a pride in conscientious craftsmanship. He may owe his artistic bent to his mother, a violinist who supplemented the family's meager income by playing summer seasons in the casino orchestra in the nearby seaside resort of Arcachon. While his earlier works were realistic and naturalistic studies of a sordid and corrupt world, Anouilh later adopted the existentialist views of Jean-Paul Sartre. In the methods of theater introduced by Louis Jouvet, Jean Giraudoux, and Roger Vitrac, Anouilh found a new angle for his writing. Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello was another playwright whose work helped shape that of Anouilh.

The Fine Line between Farce and Frown Anouilh would occasionally leave the darker and more thoughtful side of his drama by striking a balance between farce and seriousness: He once said that thanks to Molière, "the true French theater is the only one that is not gloomy, in which we laugh like men at war with our misery and our horror.

This humor is one of France's messages to the world." From frivolous and fanciful to serious, Anouilh's plays use the artificiality of the theater to criticize the human predicament—for example, the corruptive power of money, the incongruities of society, or the intricacies of decaying family ties. At times he engages his characters in role-playing and has them suffer the distance between social classes before allowing them to experience love's power in conquering appearances. In several plays, dance and music are integral elements of the action. He carefully prepared choreography and musical accompaniments for such plays so that he could call them "ballets." Except for the relatively rosy endings of a few, these works have lighthearted beginnings, gradually darken, and then end gloomily.

Influence and Impact In terms of literary style, Anouilh is difficult to categorize, because his work shows evidence of all major twentieth-century French artistic trends. Because of his collaboration with many of France's greatest artists, the complexity of Anouilh's work is unsurprising. Also of no surprise is how, after fifty plays in fifty years, Anouilh has a wide-reaching sphere of influence in both the past and present of French theater.

Works in Critical Context

While he overcame indecision and a fear of risk through his work, Anouilh took criticism of his work personally and with difficulty; however, his efforts were generally well-received and considered a success. Furthermore, his work fared better when it was revived.

Antigone (1942) Premiering near the end of the German occupation of World War II, Anouilh's reinterpretation of Antigone was a great success because the French audience identified with Antigone's resistance to her uncle Creon, the ruler of Thebes. In a review for Horizon, Germaine Brée insightfully notes that the essence of Anouilh's characters is a "fidelity to the role one is designated to play, the acceptance of oneself in a given part whatever its essential absurdity." Critic John Edmond Harvey also captures the core of the conflict: "Heroine and spectator alike uncover the true meaning of her role. Her destiny is not, as everyone has believed all along, to subordinate civil obligations to those of family and religion. Creon lets slip a few words in praise of everyday happiness and all is over: Antigone pounces on these words, and in a flurry of rhetoric she suddenly understands that her role is to reject compromise, to spurn all life which is less than perfection." For a French public a few months away from liberation, the sobriety of Antigone heightened the tragedy of Antigone's negation.

Responses to Literature

1. In *Antigone* why do you think Anouilh writes in the stage instructions that the play should be set "without historical or geographical implications"? How

- does the lack of environment help or hurt you as you read and picture the set[ting]?
- 2. Imagine you are directing Antigone. What feelings and ideas could you evoke with select settings? Consider a countryside setting, a castle setting, an alley, and a bedroom. What setting would you choose to convey the play's message, and why?

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Paul Antschel

SEE Paul Celan

Guillaume Apollinaire

BORN: 1880, Rome DIED: 1918, Paris

NATIONALITY: French, Italian GENRE: Poetry, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS: Alcools (1913)

The Cubist Painters (1913)
The Breasts of Tiresias (1917)

Caligrammes (1918)

Overview

Guillaume Apollinaire is known as a leader in the development of avant-garde artistic movements in Europe, and as the person who coined the word "surrealism." In his brief but prolific career, he produced innovative poetry and theater, and influential works of criticism and literary

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theory. He became a legend for his artistic daring and his flamboyant, bohemian personality.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Cosmopolitan Childhood Apollinaire was born in Rome on August 26, 1880, under the name Wilhelm Apollinaris de Kostrowitsky. He was born out of wedlock to a poor Polish noblewoman and an Italian army officer, who abandoned Apollinaire's mother soon after the boy's birth. He spent his youth moving around the French Riviera with his gambling mother and a younger brother. During this difficult but exciting childhood, he learned several languages, developing a cosmopolitan outlook and an interest in literature. He attended schools in Monaco, Cannes, and Nice, but did not pass the baccalaureate exam and never went to college.

On the Artistic Scene in Paris By the age of eighteen, Apollinaire had settled in Paris. Over the next few years, he worked as a bank clerk and journalist; in between, he spent a year as a private tutor in Germany. At the same

time, he became actively involved in the intellectual world of the French capital. He befriended symbolist poets such as Alfred Jarry, and avant-garde artists such as Georges Braque, Henri Rousseau, and Marcel Duchamp. His friendship with the young Pablo Picasso marked a turning point in Apollinaire's career. He became a defender of experimentation and innovation in the arts. His essays on cubism, starting in 1904 and culminating with a book on *The Cubist Painters* (1913), remain pertinent for art critics. His writings helped bring artists such as Picasso, Braque, and Rousseau to a wider audience.

Living in an age that fostered inventions such as the airplane and cinema, Apollinaire was fascinated by technology and its potential for the future of culture. He was also greatly influenced by innovations in contemporary art and music. Never affiliated solely with one group or school, but a partisan of all modern artists, Apollinaire was intrigued by and tended to associate with, those who appeared challenging or antagonistic toward bourgeois society. This inclination probably led to his six-day imprisonment in September of 1911, when he was wrongly suspected of being connected with the theft of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre. He tried to implicate Picasso in the crime, but both were exonerated.

Artistic Experiments Apollinaire published his first book of poetry, The Rotting Magician, in 1909. His first collection of short stories, The Heresiarch and Co., published a year later, was nominated for the prestigious Goncourt Prize. His first important poetry collection, Alcools (1913), was experimental in content but largely conventional in form, except for the complete (and thenshocking) absence of punctuation.

Another project from this period, At What Time Will a Train Leave for Paris? (1914), is a pantomime Apollinaire created along with two painters and a musician. In this play, which never reached the stage, and the Apollinaire poem on which it is based, a man with no facial features enchants the women of Paris with his flute, in the manner of the Pied Piper of Hamlin. Literary scholar Willard Bohn has suggested that this play is the first theatrical example of Dadaism, a movement officially launched two years later in 1916. Like all Dadaist works, it is intended to shock its audience; words are reduced to their sound and cadence, and the human voice becomes just another urban noise, like an automobile horn.

After the outbreak of World War I, Apollinaire volunteered to defend his adopted country. He joined the infantry and served on the frontlines until he suffered a head wound during combat in March of 1916. He was sent back to Paris, where he resumed his literary career while convalescing.

"A Surrealist Drama" Apollinaire gained notoriety in 1917 with the staging of his play The Breasts of Tiresias. He coined a new word for the play's subtitle: "A Surrealist Drama." By "surrealist," Apollinaire meant a representation that surpassed traditionally simplistic or sentimental

realism. He felt that theater should suggest the infinite possibilities of the modern world, in which science was turning fantasy into reality. The results might shock or outrage traditional audiences, but would appeal to the modern mindset that understands life as an unpredictable blend of tragedy, comedy, and surprise.

The Breasts of Tiresias takes place on the island of Zanzibar. Therese, a new feminist, refuses to bear children. Her breasts—colored balloons—liberate themselves and facial hair magically appears. Therese becomes Tiresias, the sexually unstable sage of ancient Greek myth. A character named "The Husband" decides to assume his patriotic duty to repopulate society, assisted only by an incubator. This broad, zany burlesque, punctuated by music, juggling, and slapstick comedy, established a model for advanced avant-garde theater that influenced the Dadaists and budding surrealists such as André Breton.

Apollinaire was now a leader of the avant-garde. In November of 1917, he delivered an influential lecture entitled "The New Spirit and the Poets," a manifesto for what art might accomplish in the new century. If writers now enjoyed greater liberty than at any other time, he said, they also bore the responsibility of creating a literature that conveyed the spirit of this new age. They should dwell in the realm of pure invention and total surrender to inspiration, taking risks and being as experimental as scientists.

Early Death Following his own advice, Apollinaire engaged in daring experimentation in his poetry, while leaving a prismatic record of his experiences in the war. His second collection, Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War (1918), features early examples of visual poetry, in which the words form designs on the page, and collage poems reminiscent of Cubist creations. Some poems consist of snatches of overheard conversation.

Apollinaire, who had suffered numerous bouts of unrequited love, married Jacqueline Korb, a woman to whom he had written during the war, in May of 1918. However, the marriage was short. Weakened by the head wound from which he never fully recovered, the poet succumbed to the influenza epidemic that ravaged Europe at the close of World War I. He died on November 9, two days before the armistice ending the war was signed.

Works in Literary Context

Guillaume Apollinaire was an artistic free spirit. He was educated in the traditional canons of Western literature, but by no means bound by their conventional assumptions. The Romantic poets were an influence on him, as were French symbolists such as Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud. More direct influences were the writers, painters, and musicians with whom he surrounded himself in Paris. He is famous for his positive appraisal of the notoriously cruel Marquis de Sade (from whom

originated the term "sadistic") as "the freest spirit that ever existed."

Dada, Cubism, and the Spectacle Apollinaire's fame as a playwright rests upon a single work, The Breasts of Tiresias, but his interest in the theater was abiding. Had he lived longer, he may have established a greater reputation as a dramatist. His stage work is noteworthy for incorporating the substance of intellectual movements, such as Dadaism and cubism, into traditional comic genres such as farce and sex comedy. The principles of surprise and spectacle are paramount in his theatrical creations. In Tiresias, characters move about constantly, dancing, performing acrobatics and magic tricks, breaking dishes, and cutting hair; costumes include electric lights and painted faces; actors shout their lines through megaphones; and carefully lettered placards repeating lines of poetry appear frequently to echo the dialogue. In one of his earlier plays, anchovies leap out of their barrels to sing. Yet his are not nonsense plays; rather, in a radical break with nineteenth-century theater, he creates rich, multidimensional spectacles that involve the spectator.

A New Poetry in Traditional Forms Apollinaire's poetry and short stories are extravagantly imaginative, full of fantastic characters and situations. Like the symbolist writers before him, he stressed that realistic and naturalistic approaches to writing impose arbitrary limitations on the artist's vision. Unlike the symbolists, however, whose work intentionally ignored everyday reality, Apollinaire's strategy was to confront and transform worldly experience. Many themes in Alcools and Calligrammes—images of technology, for example, and the alienation of modern existence—had never been treated before in serious poetry and though some of his themes hark back to Romanticism, including love, nostalgia for childhood, and solitude, his techniques were very up-to-date. He reveled in the irreverent attitudes of Dadaism, the fragmented perspectives in cubist painting, and the flexible structures of jazz. He deliberately juxtaposed the modern with the traditional, and the serious with the ludicrous, in his effort to grapple with the complicated, contradictory realities of the twentieth century.

A Figurehead or a Prophet? Apollinaire's visual poetry, fantastical theater, and pornographic novels; his theoretical essays championing literary experimentation; and his charismatic personality all represent the artistic traits that led Tristan Tzara and the Dadaists, André Breton and the surrealists, and other literary outlaws to claim him as their figurehead, and even their prophet. At the time of his death in 1918, he was the unofficial leader and spokesman of the Paris literary avant-garde. His legacy is claimed by writers such as Jean Cocteau and Gertrude Stein; he also had a notable impact on modern art, through his contribution to the development of cubism.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Apollinaire's famous contemporaries include:

Gertrude Stein (1874–1946): A noted American modernist writer, and part of Apollinaire's literary circle in Paris.

Tristan Tzara (1896–1963): A Romanian-French poet and essayist, and a leading figure of Dadaism.

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918): A British soldier-poet of World War I.

- **T. S. Eliot** (1888–1965): An Anglo-American poet; his breakthrough piece, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," was published in 1915.
- **D. H. Lawrence** (1885–1930): A British novelist and poet, a modernist persecuted in his time for the eroticism of his prose

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): A Spanish painter closely associated with cubism, who was a close friend of Apollinaire.

Erik Satie (1866–1925): A French avant-garde composer and author.

Works in Critical Context

Despite his short life and relatively slim body of work, Guillaume Apollinaire looms large in twentieth-century cultural history. He stood on the crest of a wave that broke over the aesthetic sensibilities of Paris, transforming them forever. Aside from the quality and notoriety of his own work, his tireless advocacy for emerging and innovative artists helped bring cubism, fauvism, Dada, and surrealism into the limelight. Some of his friends, and at least one of his biographers (Francis Steegmuller) claim that his knowledge of art was superficial at best; others rank him among the century's greatest art critics.

A Leader of the International Avant-Garde Apollinaire's iconic stature has only grown in the generations since his death. Although some critics hesitate to rank him in the highest echelons of poetry, his vision of artistic freedom, and his willingness to take artistic risks, are his lasting legacies. Much Scholarship on Apollinaire has explored his role in the cultural milieu of the Parisian art world (for example, Steegmuller's Apollinaire: Poet Among the Painters), and has juxtaposed his artistic theory with his literary works. The American scholar Willard Bohn has written several definitive works on the artist, including Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde and, more recently, a study of the impact of Calligrammes on modern visual poetry. Bohn argues that "it is instructive to study Apollinaire's reception: how his work was received by various artists and writers and what they thought of it," because such study can help us "shed

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Guillaume Apollinaire was a key figure in the artistic movements known as Dada and surrealism. The following works represent landmarks in these movements; each created an outrage in its time.

King Ubu (1896), a play by Alfred Jarry. This glorious and vulgar satire sparked a riot after its very first word—a four-letter word—was uttered on stage.

Parade (1917), a ballet with music by Erik Satie and scenario by Jean Cocteau. Apollinaire used the word "surrealism" to describe the premiere of this production, with sets designed by Pablo Picasso; it led to that rare cultural disturbance, a classical music riot.

The Magnetic Fields (1920), a novel by André Breton and Philippe Soupault. Claimed as the first surrealist novel, it was created through the technique of automatic writing, spontaneous and uncensored.

The Gas Heart (1920), a play by Tristan Tzara. This savage theatrical parody consists of a sequence of absurd non sequiturs, spoken by characters named after parts of the body.

Un Chien Andalou (An Andalusian Dog, 1928), a film by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. The slicing of an eye is just one of the shocking images in this silent masterpiece of avant-garde cinema.

new light on the paths of aesthetic exchange that characterized France's relationship with the rest of Europe and with the Americas." Recent scholarship has also looked closely at Apollinaire's erotic writings, previously ignored or denigrated, to arrive at fresh insights into his personal vision and vitality—though not necessarily nobility of character. Bohn again, for example, suggests in *Apollinaire and the Faceless Man: The Creation and Evolution of a Modern Motif* that in his erotic writing "Apollinaire takes the women for himself, consigning them to his own personal harem."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Define "Dadaism," and discuss examples of its sensibility in the work of Apollinaire.
- 2. What impact have the avant-garde movements Apollinaire is associated with, such as surrealism and Dadaism, had on the literature and culture of today?
- 3. To what purposes does Apollinaire use humor in his writing? Provide examples from his work.
- 4. Aside from sheer visual interest, what is significant about the visual poetry Apollinaire created in *Calligrammes*?

5. How do you respond to the artistic philosophy Apollinaire expressed in works of criticism such as his essay "The New Spirit and the Poets"?

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Louis Aragon

BORN: 1897, Paris
DIED: 1982, Paris

NATIONALITY: French
GENRE: Poetry, Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

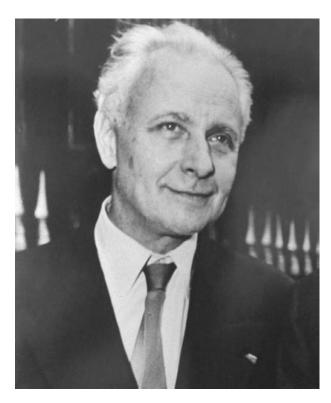
The Adventures of Telemachus (1922)

Treatise on Style (1928) Persecutor Persecuted (1931)

Aurelien (1944)

The Communists (1951)

Holy Week: A Novel (1958)



Louis Aragon Aragon, Louis, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Overview

Louis Aragon was a writer, poet, and critic who analyzed the underlying messages in the literature and politics of France. Giving his voice and images to the art of France, Aragon was a leading influence on the shaping of the novel in the early to mid-twentieth century. He was also a founder of the Dada and surrealist movements.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Child Prodigy Aragon was born in the Beaux Quartiers section of Paris on October 3, 1897, to Marguerite Toucas-Massillon and Louis Andrieux Aragon. His mother was single, and his father was already married. To hide the circumstances of his birth, his parents arranged for him to be brought up as the adoptive son of his maternal grandmother, Claire Toucas. At fourteen months he was reunited with his parents, though he was brought up to believe that his mother was his sister, his father was his godfather and tutor, and his grandmother was his adoptive mother.

Aragon was reading and writing even before he started attending Madame Boucher's private school in 1906 and the École Saint-Pierre in 1907. He completed his first novel at age nine. In 1912, he went to the Lycée Carnot in Paris, earning degrees in Latin and the sciences in 1914 and in philosophy in 1915.

In 1908, he enrolled in the Faculté de Médecine de Paris, met André Breton at Adrienne Monnier's avantgarde bookshop, and his writing came to the attention of Guillaume Apollinaire. When Aragon published his first article on Apollinaire, "Alcide," in the journal *Sicoú* (1917), Apollinaire asked Aragon to write a review of his play *The Breasts of Tiresias* (1917).

Wrote While Serving in World War I By this time, France as well as much of Europe were embroiled in World War I. While the 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungry, invoked a domino effect of war declarations because of entangling alliances of many European countries, the Great War was also caused by various military, economic, and ethnic rivalries as well. World War I was primarily fought in trenches on the Western Front, including France.

In 1917, Aragon learned the truth about his parentage after he was called into the French infantry, where he met up with fellow draftee Breton. Aragon was sent to the frontlines as a medical orderly. In the midst of battle, he composed some of the poems that appear in his first collection, *Bonfire* (1920). He also began to write his first novel, *Anicet, or, The Panorama* (1921), and the narrative *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1922). Aragon served in the military until 1919, taking part in the Allied military occupation of the Rhineland and Saar. In the spring of 1919 he, Breton, and Philippe Soupault formed a group dedicated to establishing a new art form, one that reached beyond realism to a dreamlike quality.

Medicine Abandoned for Literature Returning from war, Aragon resumed his medical studies, pondered his literary career, and set out to establish a new kind of literary movement in postwar Paris. The horrors of the Great War compelled some artists to comment on the new way they saw existence and to reject the principles upon which society was founded. Throughout 1920, he and his group staged events at venues for this unique movement called Dada, which included literary as well as artistic elements. Though the origins of the word "Dada" are unclear (it is most likely just a nonsense word), Dadaists wanted to found an alternative to established artistic conventions. Dadaist events included staged scandals of anti-art art where, for example, spectators were provided with hatchets and invited to destroy the exhibits. Aragon also considered joining the French Communist Party—as did many intellectuals in Europe excited by the potential they saw in Communism, especially after the Russian Revolution—but temporarily abandoned the idea.

Aragon's fiction also began to appear in print, including *The Panorama* (1921) and *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1922). Failing his second doctoral examination, he withdrew from medical studies to concentrate on his literary career. He published short stories in France and *Paris at Night* (1923) in Berlin. In March 1923, he

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aragon's famous contemporaries include:

Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948): Primary spiritual guru of India, and a major leader of the Indian independence movement.

James Joyce (1882–1931): Irish expatriate author, considered to be one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century

Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930): Russian poet and playwright, considered one of the forerunners of Russian futurism.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Chilean poet and communist; controversial winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945): American politician and thirty-second president of the United States. He was so popular with the people he was elected to the office four times.

became editor in chief of the weekly *Paris-Journal*, but he stayed in the position only one month. During the summer of 1923, Aragon began exchanging love letters with Denise Lévy, whom he later identified as the model for Bérénice, the heroine of his novel *Aurélien* (1944). In 1924 and 1925, Aragon worked with Breton and others to promote surrealism—the movement that included a style of writing that has surprising, dreamlike images.

"Doctor of Dada" Another of his novels and two additional narratives of the 1920s survived Aragon's getting frustrated and burning several segments. In between two critical works, he published the most important work of criticism in his career, Treatise on Style (1928). In November 1928, Aragon happened to meet the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky at a Montparnasse café. The next day, Mayakovsky introduced him to his sister-in-law, Elsa Triolet. Aragon and Triolet immediately fell in love and married soon thereafter.

Commitment to Communism Aragon had joined the French Communist Party in 1927. His commitment to communism became more intense after he met Triolet, an award-winning novelist who was herself a dedicated communist. In 1930, the couple traveled to the Soviet Union to attend a revolutionary-writers conference, and Aragon returned determined to combine his art and politics. His provocative poem "The Red Front" (1933) earned him a suspended five-year prison sentence for allegedly inciting troops to mutiny.

Writing for French Communist Party publications, Aragon praised the 1939 German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. Signed only days before World War II began, the agreement stated the two countries would not attack each other and included the division of Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. (Despite this pact, the Germans later attacked the Soviet Union, drawing the Soviets into World War II on the side of the Allies.) One 1939 piece by Aragon, "Long Live the Peace!" (published in *Ce Soir*) provoked the French authorities into shutting down the newspaper.

Served in Military During World War II In September 1939 as Aragon was starting his major work, the narrative series The Real World, he was mobilized for war as a member of the French military. He was first sent to the 220th Régiment Régional de Travailleurs, a labor battalion to which politically suspect individuals—communists, anarchists, fascists, and others—were assigned. By February 1940, he was put in charge of a unit of stretcher bearers attached to the newly created Third Division Légère Mécanique. Captured by the Germans in Angoulême, Aragon led a daring escape, getting thirty men in six vehicles to freedom in June 1940. Two days later, he volunteered to rescue several wounded men who were trapped by enemy fire. For this action, Aragon was awarded a Croix de Guerre as well as the Medaille Militaire.

Postwar Emphasis on Nonfiction Immediately after World War II ended, Aragon returned to writing nonfiction and took on the editorship of the journal French Letters, for which he had served as a staff writer since 1949. During the 1950s, the still-confirmed communist also worked to strengthen literary alliances between France and the Soviet Union, published several works on modern painters and art, and continued to offer loving tributes to his wife right up until she died of a heart attack on June 16, 1970. Aragon himself died peacefully in his sleep just before Christmas 1982, after two months of deteriorating health.

Works in Literary Context

Louis Aragon is more than a writer to be studied for a style or a running theme. His themes were his life and his life was a composite of concerns not just with personal motifs but entire literary movements. Thus, Aragon is a twentieth-century personification of Dada. He was also at the forefront of the period in which he lived and wrote, with his pacts with surrealism and communism. All three movements make up the bulk of Aragon's fiction, poetry, and essays in his collected works and in his posthumous publications.

Dada: The Anti-Art In his poems, there exists the "antithesis of art." Such works as "The Talking Dog" are intentionally artless, nonlinear, and absurd, demonstrating the essence of Dada. In his fiction, such as The Adventures of Telemachus, Aragon introduced a protagonist who is an "anti-type," the classical archetype turned inside out, an everyman who is also no man and who is

immersed in a narrative technique of stream of consciousness that is reduced to a single lingering utterance. The name "Eucharis," for instance, is enunciated four hundred times: "Eucharis, Eucharis, Eucharis...."

Postwar Novels Aragon's work had a great impact on others. Some of his postwar works can be seen as anticipating the *nouveaux romans*, or new novels, of postmodern writers as varied as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Kathy Acker. As were the existentialists and others he included in his ambitious studies, Aragon was a commanding intellect of *la France réveillée* (France awakened).

Works in Critical Context

Because Aragon's career was marked by distinct, even contradictory phases, he took criticism from two different sides. As one of the leading theorists of the avant-garde art movements of Dada and surrealism, he received fairly favorable, though limited, criticism of his writing. In response to his surrealistic novel Paris Peasant (1926), for example, several critics gave high praise. Biographer and critic Lucile F. Becker, for instance, called the book "one of the masterpieces of French twentieth-century literature." As a loyalist to the French Communist Party, however, Aragon received several conflicting responses. Early on he was labeled an opportunist or political hack by some observers, while his political allies praised this "Poet of the Resistance" whose stirring patriotic works inspired the nation's fight against the Nazi occupation forces of World War II.

By the 1950s, as a writer of politically oriented fiction for a limited audience, Aragon was little noticed outside his political circle. "Even in France," Becker reported, "very little critical material [had] appeared on Aragon other than in the Communist press, which hailed all of his work indiscriminately." It was not until the late 1950s and the appearance of his series *The Real World*—a cross between a communist manifesto and a kind of personal communist coming-out—that the author reached a wider critical audience, with such works as the final novel in the series, *Holy Week*.

Holy Week Less politically motivated than his earlier work, the story of French king Louis XVIII's escape from Napoleon in the nineteenth century was favored by the literary critics. As Becker noted, those who had "ignored or discounted Aragon's previous work because of his political sympathies praised what they termed his return to objectivity." Leon S. Roudiez observed in the Saturday Review, "a philosophy of history, a social ethic, and a political ideology inform [the novel's] entire structure . . . its Marxist flavor is rarely obtrusive."

Responses to Literature

1. In the 1920s, Aragon made a transition from Dadaism to surrealism. In the 1950s, Aragon made a transition from surrealism to Communism. His series

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Aragon's involvement in Dadaism and surrealism had a profound impact on literature. Here are a few works by writers who have also been associated with one or the other movements in particular or who influenced Dadaism and surrealism in general:

The Automatic Message (1933), by André Breton. In this important nonfiction treatise, the author discusses automatism in the context of surrealism.

Last Nights of Paris (1929), by Philippe Soupault. In this small novel is some mystery, some obsession, and much Dada.

Djinn (1981), by Alain Robbe-Grillet. This nouveau roman, or new novel, presents itself as one of the most experimental and most challenging reads.

The Real World demonstrates these "themes" and expresses his personal and stylistic transformation. Make a group effort to distinguish these literary and political shifts by surveying the three movements. In pairs, do research in order to define one of the three: Dadaism, surrealism, and communism. Share your definitions as a group. How are the movements similar? How are they different?

- 2. Historians look back on the periods of 1917 through 1920 and the 1940s through 1950s as those involving the "Red Scare." In the United States, the fear of communism's infiltration was so great that accusations were made against citizens who might or might not have been "commies," "pinkos," or "reds." Research the Red Scare by investigating such phenomena as the anticommunist witch hunts, McCarthyism, slander, libel, and propagandist technique. Where would Aragon fit into your research? How did he combine his art and politics?
- 3. The literature and art of any period is a response—to social concerns, political attitudes, or cultural events. As a group effort, find several selections of social or political music or art. Make copies to teach each other in a seminar session. For instance, if one person chooses "L'internationale" to share with the group, what could be said about this Soviet national anthem? Who wrote the lyrics? Who composed the music? What, in addition to patriotism, is being expressed?
- 4. To put Aragon's military contributions into perspective, conduct a group investigation into France's part in World War II. Search for military documents, personal or professional letters, newspaper entries, journal entries, or anything useful in aiding your understanding of France and its fighters. Who were

their allies? What goals did the resistance groups fight for? How did they perform rescues? What is meant by the Fall of France?

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Reinaldo Arenas

BORN: 1943, Oriente Province, Cuba DIED: 1990, New York, New York, U.S.A.

NATIONALITY: Cuban

GENRE: Fiction, Drama, Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Celestino before Dawn (1967)

Hallucinations (1969)

The Palace of the White Skunks (1975)

Farewell to the Sea (1986) Before Night Falls (1992)

Overview

A member of the generation of Cuban writers who emerged on the literary scene of the island during the 1960s, Reinaldo Arenas has been almost unanimously



Reinaldo Arenas Arenas, Reinaldo, photograph. Carol Halebian / Liaison / Getty Images.

hailed as one of the most significant authors contributing to the formation of a "new writing" mode in Spanish America. His passionate works are examples of the radical changes experienced by Cuban society and culture during its first postrevolutionary years. Within his group of younger authors, which has come to be broadly and imprecisely identified as the "Post-Boom" generation, Arenas voiced staunch opposition to any sort of power, be it political or cultural, that imposes an official ideology on the imagination, on perception, and on the individual's social conduct.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Humble Origins Arenas was born on July 16, 1943, near Holguín, in the province of Oriente, Cuba. Shortly after Arenas's birth his father abandoned the family, and his mother moved into her parents' home. Arenas lived there with eleven aunts, a grandmother who frequently interrupted her domestic chores to pray, and a grandfather who, Arenas says, would threaten to commit suicide every time he got drunk. Arenas learned to read and

write from his mother and spent all of his childhood in this humble, rural family environment.

By 1958, his mother had moved with him to Holguín, then a major agricultural center in western Cuba. By this time, Cuba was undergoing political turmoil as Fulgencio Batista had seized power in the early 1950s. Though Batista's government became legitimized in the mid-1950s, rebel forces led by revolutionary Fidel Castro continued to challenge his rule. At age fifteen, Arenas decided to join Castro's revolution and fought in the nearby Sierra de Gibara against Batista's army. After Castro-led rebel forces overthrew Batista's government and Castro became prime minister in 1959, Arenas returned to Holguín, where he received a scholarship from the new revolutionary government to study agricultural accounting. (Castro later became president of Cuba, holding that post until his resignation in 2008.)

Upon completing his degree, Arenas went to work at a poultry farm located in the Sierra Maestra, the southern mountain range of the province, but soon he became tired of pastoral life and left for Havana, Cuba's capital, to attend a national training program for economic planners. In 1962, he undertook this new specialization at the Universidad de la Habana but soon lost interest. The following year, he began working as a staff member of the Biblioteca Nacional and decided to make writing central to his life.

Early Success Despite Political Difficulties Even though Arenas had been writing since age thirteen, it was not until 1964 that he was able to finish his first mature novel, Celestino before Dawn. In 1965, it received a Primera Mención at the Concurso Nacional de Novela Cirilo Villaverde, and it was published in Havana in 1967. The novel was well received by Cuban critics, but shortly thereafter, due in part to political pressures as Castro's government became increasingly repressive, Arenas's voice was stifled as the reprinting of his novel was prohibited. Arenas grew disillusioned as the revolutionary leader he once supported came to be just as dictatorial as his predecessor.

Arrests and Escape Castro's government began aggressively pursuing political dissidents and others deemed socially undesirable. As a homosexual and a critic of the government, Arenas was a target of harassment. He was charged with ideological deviation in 1973, and convicted for being extravagant, immoral, and for publishing abroad without official consent. He was sent to prison in Havana, but after a few months he managed to escape and remained free under disguises. In 1974, he was rearrested and remained in the Morro Castle prison in Havana. He was freed in 1976 after signing an agreement not to write again.

Rewrote Lost Novel After Arenas's release, however, he began rewriting his fourth and most ambitious novel, Farewell to the Sea (1982). In 1971, Arenas had given the original 1969 manuscript to a close friend in order to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Arenas's famous contemporaries include:

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961): One of the few American novelists to live in and write extensively about Cuba.

Fulgencio Batista Zaldivar (1901–1973): Cuban dictator overthrown by Castro and rebel forces in 1958.

Fidel Castro (1926–): Controversial president of Cuba from 1959 until 2008.

Che Guevara (1928–1967): Iconic guerrilla leader who helped to overthrow Batista in the Cuban Revolution.

avoid its confiscation by the government. The friend, in turn, passed it on to some old women he knew for better security. The content of the novel apparently offended the traditional morals of the women, who proceeded to burn it. Arenas then rewrote it, and just before his arrest in 1973 he hid the manuscript in the tile roof of his Havana home. His status as an ex-convict, however, did not allow him to return to the same house, and after a failed attempt to recover the manuscript from the roof, he considered it lost for a second time.

Fled to the United States Arenas spent 1976 through 1980 working on the third version of this novel and living a somewhat picaresque life in order to survive. He did a variety of menial jobs and constantly changed residences. On May 5, 1980, Arenas, one of the thousands of Cuban refugees who left the island from the port of Mariel, arrived in Florida. After a short stay in Miami, he moved to New York City, where he wrote the rest of his life without refraining from passionate denunciations of Fidel Castro's revolution.

Life and Cuba Covered in Last Book His final work, Before Night Falls (1993), is an autobiography that covers, both tragically and humorously, key episodes of his life from early childhood to his last days in the United States. More than an autobiographical work, the book is a dramatic example of a poetic memoir and testimony. In Before Night Falls, Arenas exposes the corruption and evil that have dominated Cuban political history and that finally led the nation into the iron grip of Castro and "political suicide." It is also a universal indictment of the basic hypocrisy and dishonesty of society. In order to denounce and fight this social oppression, Arenas irreverently brings forward his own homosexuality and emphasizes the liberating dimension of writing.

On December 6, 1990, after several years of suffering from AIDS, he wrote a letter to be published after his death and committed suicide in his New York apartment.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Arenas was an openly gay writer in a time when Cuba was trying to repress and oppress all forms of what the government considered "immoral" behavior. The difficulties he faced were similar to those faced by many writers and artists; here are a few works that deal with this theme.

Gypsy Ballads (1928), poems by Federico García Lorca. In this collection, García Lorca explored themes of sexuality amidst a romantic and surrealistic Spanish background. Giovanni's Room (1956), a novel by James Baldwin. In this work, a young man in Paris begins an affair with Giovanni, who is due to be executed.

Howl (1955), a poem by Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg's best known poem celebrates the lives of the disenfranchised, the disrespected, and the misunderstood people of the Beat generation.

Before Night Falls (2000), a film by Julian Schnabel. This film based on Arenas's final autobiographical novel stars Oscar winner Javier Bardem.

Works in Literary Context

Greatly influenced by his experiences during a turbulent era in Cuban history, Arenas's fictions are characterized by surrealist imagery, satire, and elements of the fantastic while being rooted in reality and sincere emotion. Considered a subversive intellectual and a deviant writer by Cuban authorities, his work reflects the literary marginalization, political confinement, and exile that he suffered.

Use of Parody Parody is the imitation of an existing work or style in order to achieve humor or drive home a message different from the original work. Parts of Celestino before Dawn closely follow some of André Breton's surrealistic poetical formulas, while others draw on verses by Jorge Borges, Arthur Rimbaud, Federico García Lorca, and Eliseo Diego, among others. In Farewell to the Sea, there are parodic reminiscences of works by Homer, Walt Whitman, and the Cuban writer José Martí. In general, the parodic function of Arenas's works undermines the controlling and often political forces in the novels.

Oppression and the Illusion of Freedom Throughout Arenas's works the motif of "no escape" keeps reminding the reader that absolute freedom and truth is illusory. However, this is offset by the passionate longing for harmony in all of Arenas's works. In the face of divine silence and human blindness, liberation and insight may be found in writing and rewriting, which reveals the imagination's boundless capacity.

The trilogy of Celestino before Dawn, The Palace of the White Skunks, and Farewell to the Sea can be considered as one continuous text that deals with the central theme of oppression. The first novel is the story of a child who lives a cruel life of persecution and punishment at the hands of his grandparents. The young anonymous narrator tells in a lyrical manner of his liberating experiences with his alter ego, the young cousin Celestino, whose predilection for poetic writing constitutes a major transgression from the grandfather's vision of order.

The second novel of this group involves an interlude in the life of the same narrator, now an adolescent living in Holguín; he is on the verge of sexual awakening while his country undergoes the crumbling effects of the insurgent fight against the forces of Batista. The death of the adolescent narrator coincides with the end of the novel and confirms the allegorical dimension of the story. Farewell to the Sea has a different hero, a young poet living in Cuban revolutionary society, and the novel presents a day-to-day account of a vacation at the seashore with his wife. The first half of the book comprises the wife's diary, and the second half is a long poem written by the young man. As in the previous novel, death seems the only feasible escape, but this time in the form of the husband's suicide.

While Arenas has been recognized as an important Latin American writer and lauded for his work, he was widely censored in his own country, limiting his popular influence there. His voice is still considered significant, however, especially among international audiences.

Works in Critical Context

Having emerged from a totalitarian milieu that he described in *Encounter* as one holding that "there's nothing more dangerous than new ideas," Arenas continues to garner attention and praise as an eminent writer who—in the tradition of fantastic Latin American fiction—depicts the reality of life in contemporary Cuba.

Commenting in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* on the effect of the author's writings, Alberto Manguel observed, "Reinaldo Arenas' Cuba is a dreamworld of repeatedly frustrated passions." The critic further theorized that the writer's works have turned Castro into a "literary creation," rendering the dictator "immortal" and "condemn[ing him] to repeat [his] sins for an eternity of readers."

Hallucinations Hallucinations, Arenas's second novel, chronicles the life of nineteenth-century Mexican monk and adventurer Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, who manages an unbelievable series of escapes from his captors only to fight in an ultimately doomed revolution. "Servando's real crime," theorized Alan Schwartz in Washington Post Book World, "is his refusal to be demoralized in a world completely jaded and dedicated to the exploitation of power and wealth." Arenas defended Hallucinations against claims by several critics that the surrealistic rendering of Servando's exploits should have more closely approximated the monk's actual adventures.

"True realism," the author told interviewer Ana Roca, "is fantasy, the fantastic, the eclectic. It knows no bounds." Arenas further maintained that the depiction of Servando he envisioned could only be accomplished by weaving historical fact with fantasy: "My aim was to portray this compelling personality as a part of the American myth, the New World myth...part raving madman and part sublime, a hero, an adventurer, and a perennial exile." Schwartz conceded that any flaws in Arenas's "ambitious technique" were "overshadowed by [the author's] madcap inventiveness, the acid satire, and the powerful writing." Despite (or because of) this, the antirevolutionary implications of *Hallucinations* led to the banning of the book in Cuba by the Castro government.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Determine how coincidental it is that Arenas was eventually imprisoned much like the main character in *Hallucinations*. Are there any other ways in which Arenas's life mirrored that of his character?
- 2. Some scholars have suggested that times of great change and conflict result in greater works of art than times of peace and prosperity. How might the oppression of Cuba have had a positive influence on Arenas's writing?
- 3. Compare some passages in *Before Night Falls* with the movie version of the book. Is Arenas's Cuba much like the movie version's? In what ways is the movie different? Why do you think these changes were made?
- 4. Can you find any passages in *Before Night Falls* where Arenas foreshadows his own death? How do you think committing suicide affects the legacy of an artist, if at all?

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図 José María Arguedas

BORN: 1911, Andahuaylas, Peru DIED: 1969, La Molina, Peru NATIONALITY: Peruvian

GENRE: Fiction
MAJOR WORKS:

Los ríos profundos (Deep Rivers, 1958) Todas las sangres (All Bloods, 1964)

Overview

José María Arguedas is one of Peru's leading novelists, along with Mario Vargas Llosa. However, while Vargas Llosa belongs to the Western mainstream, Arguedas wrote as a spokesman of the indigenous Quechua-speaking Andean world, setting out to correct the distorted, stereotyped image of the Indian presented by earlier fiction.

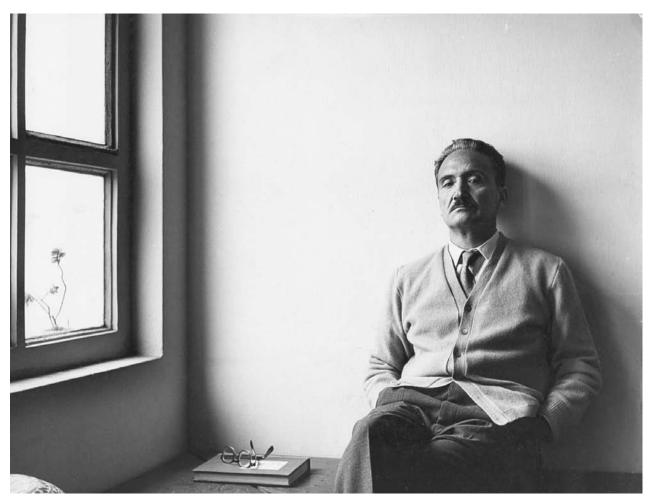
Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Remote Culture José María Arguedas was born on January 18, 1911, in the province of Andahuaylas in the southern Peruvian Andes mountains. He was the son of Victor Manuel Arguedas Arellano, a lawyer, and Victoria Altamirano Navarro.

His birth and childhood in Andahuaylas were important to the world he created in fiction and informed his historical sense of Andean peoples. Even today, access to Andahuaylas is difficult; in the time of Arguedas's childhood, however, the province was almost completely isolated from the outside world. Its capital city, Abancay, located on the low eastern slopes of the Andes' western chain, was then and remains today oriented toward Cuzco, the ancient center of the Incan empire.

After his mother's death and his father's remarriage, Arguedas grew up as a virtual servant in his stepmother's home. Thus, although he was non-Indian, for all practical purposes he grew up not only within the Indian culture of the house servants and field workers in the hacienda, but also as a monolingual Quechua speaker.

Merging Two Worlds As a teenager, Arguedas began to learn Spanish as a literary and intellectual vehicle of expression. Throughout his life, however, Arguedas continued to write in Quechua in an effort to convert it into a modern literary language. As a writer, he was faced with the problem of translating into the alien medium of Spanish the sensibility of a people who express themselves in Quechua. His initial solution was to modify Spanish in



José María Arguedas © Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru / Instituto Riva-Aguero

such a way as to incorporate the basic features of Quechua syntax and thus reproduce something of the special character of Indian speech; but these experiments were only partially successful, and he later decided on a correct Spanish manipulated to convey Andean thought-patterns.

As a university student, Arguedas was involved with the academic and intellectual circles interested in change and social justice in Peru. His association with the emerging political-left parties landed him in jail in 1937 during the dictatorship of General Oscar Raimundo Benavides. Thanks to Arguedas's future wife, Celia Bustamante Vernal (whom he married in 1939), and a dedicated core of friends, he was eventually freed. Arguedas soon became a full-time anthropologist, field researcher, and novelist.

Early Publications Arguedas's first book, Agua. Los escoleros. Warma kukay (Water. The Students. Puppy Love), usually referred to as Agua, brings together three short stories that deal with the economically exploited Indian communities. Upon its publication in 1935, it was largely ignored.

In 1941 he published his first novel, Yawar fiesta (Blood Fiesta). Diamantes y pedernales. Agua (Diamonds and Flintstones. Water, 1954) includes the contents of

Agua and introduces his first and only novella, Diamantes y pedernales. His major novel, Los ríos profundos (1958; translated as Deep Rivers, 1978) is widely considered his masterpiece. With its publication, Arguedas became a preeminent figure not only in Peruvian life but also among the international scholars who study Peru's ancient and contemporary civilizations.

El sexto (The Sixth, 1961) followed, a novel about the confinement of political prisoners in the most dreaded of Peruvian prisons, El Sexto. This hallucinatory novel was followed by the story of Rasu Niti, the master scissor dancer in La agonía de "Rasu Niti" (Rasu Niti's Agony, 1962).

Anthropological Inspiration Arguedas was one of the first anthropologists to demonstrate the range, role, and significance of poetic composition for complex singing arrangements. He composed many short ballads and lyrics in Quechua, but perhaps his greatest poetic composition in Quechua is his Túpac Amaru Kamaq taytanchisman; Haylli-taki. A nuestro padre creador Túpac Amaru; Himno-canción (To Our Lord the Father-Creator Túpac Amaru; Hymn-Song, 1962).

From 1963 until 1969, he held an important teaching position at the Universidad Nacional Agraria in La Molina. In 1963 he also became director of the Casa de la Cultura, Peru's major institution for the organization and promotion of artistic and intellectual activity.

Todas las sangres (All Bloods), was published in 1964. In this later work, Arguedas's interests changed from the Andean villages of Los ríos profundos-set in the early 1920s before roads, cars, and trucks made communication easier among the many isolated areas of the Andean territory—to a deteriorating and partially abandoned provincial capital in Todas las sangres. As the title of the novel indicates, the plot attempts to bring together the many races (or bloods) that constitute a fragmented society caught in the corrosive process of becoming a nation. With its emphasis on modernity, Todas las sangres spells out the beginning of the end of the world of Agua. Arguedas regarded that ending with more terror than relief, for the Andean culture whose achievements and beauty he had so dexterously portrayed could no longer aspire to continue untouched if the Indians were to liberate themselves from domination.

Later Life Arguedas often experienced intense and crippling depression. In 1966, soon after his divorce from his first wife, he attempted suicide. In 1967 he married Sybila Arredondo, a Chilean; however, in 1969, in a bathroom near his office at La Molina, he succeeded in committing suicide.

El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo (The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below, 1969) was published after Arguedas's death. In it, Arguedas attempts to come to grips with the new world wrought in Peru by the forces of hunger, improved communications, the fast influx of foreign capital, and the contending ideologies of the time. In 1983 his widow, Sybila, with others, edited and published his Obras completas (Complete Works).

Works in Literary Context

The Complexity of Andean Society The context of José María Arguedas's fiction is the semifeudal socioeconomic order that prevailed in the Andean highlands from the Spanish Conquest until recent times. However, while earlier writers had depicted a black-and-white confrontation between oppressive white landowners and a downtrodden Indian peasantry, Arguedas presents a much more complex picture of Andean society. His work as an anthropologist led him to the remote Andean villages of Peru, where he collected folktales, songs, and myths. Arguedas thus was deeply aware of the Andean literary legacy in the form of legend, art, and humor.

Authentic Indian Perspective In his search for solutions to his problem of authenticity, Arguedas searched for the means by which Spanish as a literary system would not betray the essence or the difference of what he wanted to inscribe: the Indian and his world as seen by himself. While writing Agua, he read many current Peruvian novels. He found that these texts offered a deeply

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Arguedas's famous contemporaries include:

Ruth Benedict (1887–1948): American anthropologist and proponent of cultural relativism, the theory that each culture has its own definition of right and wrong.

Pieter Botha (1916–2006): white South African prime minister (1978–1984) and president (1984–1989) who refused to abolish apartheid, the brutal state-sanctioned policy of enforced segregation of blacks and whites.

Ferruccio Lamborghini (1916–1993): Italian tractor manufacturer who founded the Lamborghini automotive brand in 1963.

Mario Vargas Llosa (1936–): leading Peruvian writer who combines realism and experimentalism in his novels; he unsuccessfully ran for the presidency in 1990.

Czeslaw Milosz (1911–2005): Polish poet who defected to the United States in 1960; his work was banned in then-Communist Poland until he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980.

false and negative view of the Indian world. Arguedas's objective in writing fiction as well as his final choice of writing in Spanish was in part driven by the passion to correct a falsehood and the need to portray the world of his childhood. Arguedas's reading of the works of Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky opened windows for the portrayal of the oppressed and the suffering.

Works in Critical Context

Early in his career as an anthropologist and novelist, Arguedas spoke about the painful task of creating an imaginary world that was based on his hatred of the world order created by the masters who oppressed the Indians. Thirteen years after the publication of *Agua*, he said he wrote it in a fit of rage (arrebato). Such a confrontational opposition became the core of Arguedas's plot structures. As Antonio Cornejo-Polar has shown in *Los universos narrativos de José María Arguedas* (1973), Arguedas's entire fictional corpus is anchored in a play of oppositions, which develops a series of variations of everricher complexity.

The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below

His final book, *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below*, was published posthumously to acclaim and recognition of the autobiographical nature of the work. Julio Ortega, writing for *Review*, described the book as "a complex and extraordinary document." Ortega concluded, "Even though this novel is not, as such, on a par with his previous books, as a document it possesses a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

José María Arguedas was part of the Indianismo movement in Latin American literature, which explored the lives of indigenous peoples. Here are some other works that examine the lives of indigenous people:

Broad and Alien Is the World (1941), a novel by Ciro Alegría. This Peruvian novel examines the effect of land reform on the indigenous Indian communities.

The Devil to Pay in the Backlands (1956), a novel by Joao Guimaraes Rosa. In this novel, considered to be the Brazilian equivalent of James Joyce's modernist landmark *Ulysses*, a bandit from the Brazilian hinterlands tells his life story to a stranger.

In the Castle of My Skin (1953), a novel by George Lamming. This autobiographical novel by the Barbados writer explores the experience of growing up in a West Indian village under colonial rule.

Men of Maize (1949), a novel by Miguel Ángel Asturias. This magical realist novel, by the Nobel Prize—winning Guatemalan writer, examines two views of maize: that of the indigenous people, who consider it sacred, and that of international corporations, who view it solely as a commercial staple.

Flint and Feather (1912), a poetry collection by E. Pauline Johnson. Selected poems from the Canadian First Nations poet focus on native themes and characters.

value of a different order, and its peculiar intensity and character confer upon it a heightened and deepened life."

Responses to Literature

- 1. When we read about an unfamiliar culture, how can we be sure that it is being presented accurately? What misunderstandings might this lead to?
- 2. Today, because of the Internet and global communications, cultural change seems to happen especially quickly. Do you think that many cultures will emerge as one larger culture as a result, or do you think people will still hold on to some of their traditional beliefs and practices? Can you apply these ideas of blending cultures to Arguedas's later works set in cities rather than small villages?
- 3. Leaving behind what you know and are familiar with can be scary and intimidating. José María Arguedas went to college and became a respected author and scholar, leaving behind the Indians he grew up with and their rural culture. But he wrote about them in his novels and also in his work as an anthropologist. Think of something you are afraid of leaving behind

- and write a list of ways that you can keep that in your life while also moving on and growing.
- 4. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research your own ethnic heritage. Write an essay analyzing how it has been presented over time and examining how and why this presentation has changed. Do you feel it is accurate as currently presented? Explain.
- 5. How can you express in one language the thoughts and words of speakers of a second language? Choose a hip-hop or rap song and "translate" it into standard English. Were you able to get across the original meaning, as well as its nuances?

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Aristophanes

BORN: 450 BCE, Athens, Greece

DIED: 385 BCE, Greece NATIONALITY: Greek

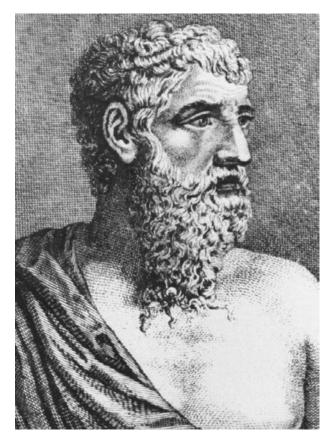
GENRE: *Plays*MAJOR WORKS:

The Acharnians (425 BCE)

Peace (421 BCE)
The Birds (414 BCE)

Lysistrata (411 BCE)

The Frogs $(405\ \text{BCE})$



Aristophanes Aristophanes, photograph. PD

Overview

Aristophanes was the greatest writer of Old Comedy in Athens in the fifth century BCE and the only playwright from that era with any complete plays surviving. Old Comedy was a form of drama that has no parallel in subsequent European literature. It was a mixture of fantasy, political and personal satire, farce, obscenity, and, in the case of Aristophanes at least, delightful lyric poetry. Although he used the language brilliantly, Aristophanes was above all an inspired creator of bizarre fantasy worlds that defy fundamental laws of rationality and logic. He paid little attention to consistency of time, place, or character and was not very interested in the logical development of a dramatic plot. He brought to his art a command of every kind of comedy, from slapstick to intellectual farce. Parody was one of his specialities, and he had a devastating way of deflating pomposity in politics, social life, and literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Equal-Opportunity Satirist Knowledge of Aristophanes is confined almost entirely to his career as a dramatist. It is believed that he was born in Athens, Greece, in c. 450 BCE, a time when the city was one of the two

leading political powers in Greece and the most important center of artistic and intellectual activity. Little is known about his family except that it was not a poor one. He had an excellent education and was well versed in literature, especially poetry, and above all Homer and the great Athenian tragic dramatists. In addition, he was well acquainted with the latest philosophical theories. All of Aristophanes' boyhood was spent in the Periclean Age, an interlude of peace between 445 and 431. When the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta broke out in 431, Aristophanes was still a youth. What part he played in the war is not known, but he probably saw some active service before it finally ended in 404.

Already famous as a young man, Aristophanes used the power of comedy throughout his long career to ridicule and deplore the shortcomings of his society. Because of Aristophanes' open sympathy toward the land-owning aristocracy, he opposed a war that spelled the destruction of agriculture, so some scholars have seen the poet as a political reactionary. It is true that Aristophanes never tired of heaping abuse on the rulers of Athens, but his comic world view kept him from partisanship of any kind. He was an equal-opportunity satirist, and one politician was just as good a target for ridicule as any other.

An Unprecedented Honor Aristophanes' career as a dramatist started in 427 BCE when he put on a play, now lost, called *The Banqueters*. A year later he brought out another play, which has not survived, *The Babylonians*, that politically criticized Athens's imperial policies. As a result, Cleon—who eventually ruled Athens and represented the will of the city's powerful merchant class—hauled the author before the council, apparently on a charge of treason. No action was taken against Aristophanes.

After 410 the Peloponnesian War situation gradually worsened, and in the winter of 407–406, a generation of other great classical writers was dying. Euripides died in Macedonia, to be followed in less than a year by his great rival Sophocles. Aristophanes clearly felt that the great days of tragedy were over, and in *The Frogs* (405 BCE), he showed Dionysus, the patron god of drama, going down to the underworld to bring Euripides back from the dead. When after many ludicrous adventures the god finally arrives in Hades, he acts as referee in a long poetic dispute between Euripides and Aeschylus, which contains much delightful comedy but also some serious criticism. After its debut, the play was given the honor of a second performance—something unheard-of at the time.

The End of War and After The Athenians eventually lost their war with Sparta, having been starved into surrender in the spring of 404. This defeat broke the spirit of many Athenians, including Aristophanes. Thereafter, the author's patriotism was colored with a nostalgic attachment to the ideal of Greek unity from earlier heroic times. Though Athenians soon regained considerable importance in both politics and intellectual life, they were

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aristophanes' famous contemporaries include:

Euripides (c. 480 BCE–406 BCE): One of the three great tragedians of classical Athens and a poet, Euripides penned ninety-five plays, of which eighteen have survived in complete form.

Cratinus (c. 520–423 BCE): As Aristophanes' rival in comic drama, Cratinus was considered one of three great masters of Athenian Old Comedy, along with Aristophanes and Eupolis. Only fragments of his work have survived.

Sophocles (c. 496 BCE–406 BCE): This Greek tragedian is one of the three greatest playwrights of ancient Greece who produced tragedies that have survived to the present day. It is believed that he wrote 120 or more plays during his lifetime, only 7 of which still exist.

Eupolis (c. 446 BCE–411 BCE): This Athenian poet of the Old Comedy was seen as Aristophanes' equal in the purity and elegance of his diction. He was also a master of irony and sarcasm. Seventeen plays are attributed to him.

Aeschylus (c. 525 BCE–456 BCE): This Greek playwright is often recognized as the founder of dramatic tragedy and is the earliest of the three great Greek tragedians that include Sophocles and Euripides.

never quite the same again. In the sphere of comedy the uninhibited boisterousness of the Old Comedy disappeared, replaced by a form that was less imaginative and spirited and more cautious and reasonable.

Aristophanes continued to write plays after the end of the war. Of them, *Women in Parliament*, a skit about equality in marriage and in ownership of property—included ideas later put forward by Plato in his *Republic*. Aristophanes lived for nearly twenty years after the war. One of his three sons, Araros, became a minor comic dramatist.

Works in Literary Context

Criticism of Politics and War The principal themes of Aristophanes' comedies reflect the poet's profound dissatisfaction with the political reality of Athens. For example, in *The Acharnians*, Aristophanes' first play, an Athenian peasant excludes himself from the Peloponnesian War by obtaining a separate truce from Sparta. Another play addressing the issue of war, *Peace*, produced in 421 BCE, involved a principal character who travels to Mt. Olympus on a dung-beetle to see what the gods have in store for his war-torn city. It includes a mock-mythological allegory of the Peloponnesian War.

Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata* (411 BCE) is both a piece about women and one of the most powerful condemnations of war in European literature. Lysistrata (even the name puns on the idea of disbanding an army) is an Athenian woman who organizes, with the help of a Spartan ally, a sex strike with a view to putting an end to the war. All of the women of Athens agree not to have sex with their soldier and politician husbands until they end the war. Of course the plan quickly works.

Athenian Foibles In addition to war and politics, Aristophanes also ridiculed characteristics of Athenians themselves and human foibles more generally. In The Wasps, he poked fun at Athenians' obsession with unnecessary lawsuits. Bdelycleon, driven to despair by his father Philocleon's compulsive attachment to jury duty, tries to keep the old man from the law courts by allowing him to conduct a trial of two dogs, one of which is called Cleon. Aristophanes satirizes two typically Athenian foibles: one, a blend of excessive zeal and meddlesome ingenuity, which often brings about ambitious projects that fail miserably; and two, passivity and inertia. In The Clouds, a name suggesting the impermanence of intellectual abstractions, the poet blames the professional philosophers of Athens for introducing a spirit of immorality into Athenian culture. He portrays Socrates as the head of a preposterous school that encourages absurd research and logically sound dishonesty. The comedy was not well received, obtaining the third prize at a competition—a crushing defeat for the poet. Finally, in The Birds, which many critics consider Aristophanes' masterpiece, the author describes a society that is ruled by birds. Conveniently located between heaven and earth, the society manages to avoid both divine excesses and human folly.

Influence As an author, Aristophanes exerted great influence not only on people in his own era but also on authors of other eras and other countries. In western Europe, Aristophanes' fame was rekindled as a result of the revival of Greek learning during the Renaissance. Later, Aristophanes' comedies were revered as great poetic works by Romantic poets and scholars. This enthusiasm determined the comic poet's place, which subsequent scholars generally did not dispute, among the greatest representatives of European literature. Poets who acknowledged their admiration for Aristophanes include Heinrich Heine, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Robert Browning, and T. S. Eliot. Aristophanes' influence has also been recognized as having been significant for satiric and comedic authors such as François Rabelais (1494-1553)—an avant-garde writer of fantasy, satire, the grotesque, dirty jokes, and bawdy songs-and Henry Fielding (1707-1754), an English novelist and dramatist who emulated Aristophanes, satirizng politicians with gusto.

Works in Critical Context

Among the various and conflicting interpretations of Aristophanes' works, there is a general admiration for the poet's seemingly boundless imaginative power and his habit of allowing the creative human spirit to triumph over all constraints of reality. Critics and scholars across the centuries have equated Aristophanes with the best of the Old Comedy, ignoring other representatives of this particular art, such as Cratinus or Eupolis, partly because only Aristophanes' comedies have survived in complete form.

Aristophanes' fame eventually waned after his death, but he quickly became central to the Western literary canon. Among the early authors who wrote commentaries on Aristophanes were Photius, the erudite patriarch of Constantinople, and John Tzetzes, the noted encyclopedist. Plato's attitude toward the comic poet was more ambivalent, but this was probably because of Aristophanes' devastating portrayal of Socrates in *The Clouds*. It is nevertheless reasonable to assume, given the prominent role played by Aristophanes in Plato's Symposium, that Plato also admired the poet's genius. Early Greek scholars compiled critical editions of Aristophanes' comedies, but they valued the comic poet solely for his magnificent language.

Later authors who represented the softer, less offensive, more refined New Comedy eclipsed Aristophanes after his death as Old Comedy's raucous hilarity stopped appealing to the tastes and sensibilities of the urban populations of the later Roman eras. Thus it was New Comedy authors, not Aristophanes, who provided a blueprint for Roman comedy, which in turn exerted a decisive influence on the European stage.

Responses to Literature

- 1. How would you compare and contrast Aristophanes' political comedy with current books, movies, and plays that lampoon political leaders?
- 2. How would you characterize different types of humor in Aristophanes' plays, and what are their different satirical effects?
- 3. Why use animals rather than human beings as the main characters? What does this bring to the satire?
- 4. Explain how *The Birds* depicts a utopia, or perfect world. Is this utopia still a paradise by our current standards? What, if anything, has changed in our values from the Classical era?
- 5. Choose a subject that is very familiar to you, such as life at school, and try to satirize the parts of it that you least like or appreciate. See if you can use humor to poke fun at certain aspects of your subject. Could you use animals, perhaps including your school mascot, to heighten the satire?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many themes consistently appear in Aristophanes' works, including themes of humanism, opposition to war, and ridicule of wrongheaded politicians whose elaborate projects come to nothing. He satirized what he did not like (and sometimes what he did like) using a peculiar mixture of fantasy, political and personal satire, farce, obscenity, and lyric poetry, often including animals as a way of conveying meaning or telling a story. Other works that rely heavily on satire include:

Gulliver's Travels (1726), a satirical novel by Jonathan Swift. This classic of English literature is both a satire on human nature and a parody of "travelers' tales," a literary genre popular during the eighteenth century. It also ridicules the ambitious and pointless scientific projects of intellectuals and the empty pride of political leaders.

The Parliament of Birds (c. 1372–1386), a poem by Geoffrey Chaucer. The author puts forward a satirical debate over different approaches to love and marriage within the context of a conference of birds who meet to choose their mates on Valentine's Day.

Animal Farm (1945), a novella by George Orwell. This bitter and inventive satire uses the metaphor of animals in a barnyard to discuss human politics generally, and the politics of the Soviet Union under Stalin in particular.

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Maristotle

BORN: 384 B.C.E., Stagira, Greece DIED: 322 B.C.E., Chalcis, Greece

NATIONALITY: Greek
GENRE: Treatises, notes

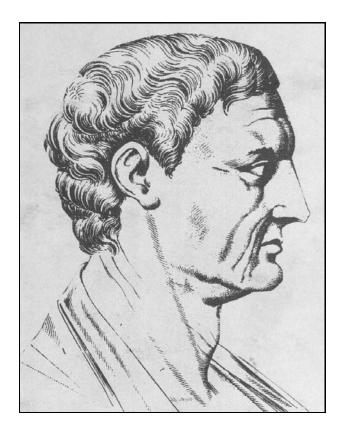
MAJOR WORKS:

Inquiry into Animals
Nicomachean Ethics

Rhetoric Politics Metaphysics On the Soul

Overview

Aristotle's importance may be greater than that of any other philosopher, not only because what he said was taken as an almost unquestionable authority during the formative periods of Western culture, but also because he



Aristotle Aristotle, engraving. The Library of Congress.

addressed so many different fields of learning. His ideas influenced practically every field of intellectual endeavor, from philosophy and theology to science and literature. Aristotle's works defined the basic categories of thought and formulated the fundamental rules of inference, in effect becoming the Western tradition's basis for thought. In addition, Aristotle's literary views, discussed in his *Poetics*, dominated literary criticism from antiquity until modern times, setting a standard for any theoretical approach to literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Love of Science Aristotle was born in Stagira, a small town in northern Greece located on the peninsula known as the Chalcidice, in the summer of 384 B.C.E. Aristotle's father, Nicomachus, was the royal doctor for the Macedonian king, Amyntas II. Young Aristotle is believed to have spent part of his childhood living with his father at the royal court in the Macedonian capital of Pella. This early connection with the Macedonian court would have a major impact on later events in his life. As a doctor's son, he was probably trained in first-aid techniques and basic drug therapy from an early age. This early training may have contributed to his love of science in general, his orderly approach to learning (evident in the highly structured nature of his works), and to his special interest in biology (clear in Inquiry into Animals). Both of Aristotle's parents died when he was young, and Proxenus, an older relative, became his guardian.

Plato and the Academy At age seventeen, Aristotle was sent to Athens to attend the most famous school in Greece, the Academy of the great philosopher Plato. At the time, Athens was the intellectual center of the world, and Plato's Academy was the center of Athens. Aristotle won recognition as the master's most brilliant student, and his energetic gathering of research and general love of books led Plato to nickname him "the reader." During his time at the Academy, Aristotle studied mathematics and dialectic, a form of argumentative reasoning. Although Aristotle was both a student and a close friend of Plato's, the strength and independence of his own mind suggests that he was never simply a follower of his teacher. Aristotle spent twenty years at the Academy, until Plato's death in 347 B.C.E.

A School of His Own Aristotle left Athens soon after Plato's death in 347 B.C.E. He settled near a Greek city called Atarneus in northern Asia Minor (now Turkey). The city's ruler, Hermias, was an avid student of philosophy who had supported Plato's Academy. He invited Aristotle and some other Academy members to set up a similar school in nearby Assos, where he provided them with everything they needed to pursue their studies. Aristotle later married Hermias's niece, Pythias, and the couple had two children, a daughter and a son.

It was in Assos that Aristotle finally stepped out of Plato's shadow and began the work that truly reflected his own interests. Instead of puzzling only over the fact that things existed at all (one of Plato's favorite areas of inquiry), he began to focus on the nature and function of the things themselves. He observed animals in their natural environments and carefully recorded his findings. The result, a huge collection of notes and longer writings, is today called the *Inquiry into Animals*. It describes in great detail the bodies, habitats, and behavior of an astonishing variety of animals, from whales to woodpeckers and from insects to elephants.

Tutor to Alexander the Great After Hermias's territory was overrun by the Persians, Aristotle moved to Mytilene. King Philip II of Macedonia, known for his prodigious military skills and expansionist plans, invited Aristotle to accept the post of tutor to his son Alexander. Philip was impressed with Aristotle's reputation and family connections to Macedonia. Aristotle accepted, and served in the position for three years, teaching the boy rhetoric, literature, science, medicine, and philosophy. According to legend, Aristotle presented his pupil with a copy of the ancient Greek epic the *Iliad*, which became Alexander's most prized possession: he slept with it under his pillow. Alexander went on to become one of the most successful military commanders in history, conquering an empire stretching from modern-day Italy to India within a span of ten years.

The Lyceum In 335 B.C.E., Aristotle returned to Athens and opened his own school, one that rivaled Plato's Academy. Since it was located at the temple of Apollo the Lycian—Lycia was an area in Asia Minor associated with the god Apollo—the school was called the Lyceum. And because Aristotle often walked up and down a covered courtyard or peripatos while lecturing, he and his followers were referred to as "Peripatetics." The students and other teachers followed the rules of Aristotle, ate their meals together, and once a month gathered for a symposium, a party of sorts, with a focus of intellectual discussion. At the same time, Aristotle continued writing what was to become an expansive body of work that encompassed the various branches of science, literature, philosophy, and history.

Death of Pupil and Teacher In 323 B.C.E., Alexander the Great died unexpectedly at the age of thirty-two. He had left no clear instructions for the management of his empire, which quickly dissolved into chaos. In Athens, anti-Macedonian sentiment boiled over and riots broke out. Aristotle, aware that his close connections to the Macedonia court and to Alexander in particular could put his life in danger, left Athens for the island of Euboea. He died there in 322 B.C.E. of a digestive ailment. Some historians have suggested that he was poisoned, but the cause of death is uncertain.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Aristotle's famous contemporaries include:

Socrates (370 B.C.E.—399 B.C.E.): Although a few people practiced something like philosophy before Socrates, his prolific career as a teacher, orator, and defender of philosophy justify his being called "The Father of Philosophy."

Alexander of Macedonia (also known as Alexander the Great) (356 B.C.E.—323 B.C.E.): This Macedonian king vastly increased the size of his kingdom and built a lasting reputation as a conqueror during the thirty-three years of his life.

Aristophanes (456 B.C.E.—ca. 386 B.C.E.): This Athenian comic playwright authored *Lysistrata*, a comedy that deals openly with sex, feminism, and pacifism.

Democritus (460 B.C.E.—370 B.C.E.): This Greek philosopher's most important theory is that all matter is composed of atoms.

Xenophon (431 B.C.E.—355 B.C.E.): This Greek historian's work gives us a window into the lives of the Greeks during his lifetime.

Works in Literary Context

After his death, Aristotle's manuscripts were hidden in a cellar in present-day Turkey by the heirs of one of his students and not brought to light again until the beginning of the first century B.C.E., when they were taken to Rome and edited by Andronicus. Andronicus's revisions probably do not represent works that Aristotle himself prepared for publication. The peculiarly clipped language in which they are written indicates that they are lecture notes organized from oral discussions of the material by Aristotle. Nevertheless, Aristotle's work had incalculable influence on Western thought for centuries to come, shaping the way artists, writers, architects, doctors, scientists, kings, queens, and even priests approached their work.

Philosophy Analysts throughout the centuries have asserted that Aristotle's philosophy is systematic, universal, and epoch-making. Trained in the Platonic tradition, Aristotle nevertheless rejected his teacher's theory of Ideas. True, in formulating his ontology, or doctrine of being, Aristotle views each individual concrete thing as a blend of matter and form. While the Aristotelian concept of form superficially resembles Plato's Ideas, the forms, as W. G. de Burgh observed, "do not exist...in a super-sensible heaven, cut adrift from the actual world of our experience.... Thus for Aristotle it is the concrete individual, not the mere universal, that has substantial being." The basic task of philosophy, according to Aristotle, is to explain why and how things are what they are. In order to learn why

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Although much of what is read about Aristotle has to do with his impact on science and logic, one should remember that he was among a number of thinkers who developed a "golden mean" concept for living. Essentially, the golden mean has to do with moderation. For instance, a coward is a person who flees from the least sign of danger, a courageous person is a person who has an appropriate level of fear in a dangerous situation, and a rash person is one who rushes into a dangerous situation that he or she is ill-equipped to deal with. The courageous person is the one who illustrates the golden mean best because this person is neither too frightened nor too rash. This individual has exercised ethical reasoning. Other works that deal with ethics include:

Atlas Shrugged (1957), a novel by Ayn Rand. This novel analyzes the responsibility of great individual thinkers and innovators to the society in which they live. Summa Theologica (c. 1274), a theological work by Thomas Aquinas. This treatise, written by a priest and Aristotle scholar, analyzes the virtues of fortitude and prudence, especially as they relate to man's relationship with God.

On the Genealogy of Morality (1887), a book by Friedrich Nietzsche. In this text, Nietzsche attempts to provide a history of morality (or ethics) and to theorize the psychological origins of various systems of belief about morality.

something exists, Aristotle insists that one must identify four fundamental causes. Using the example of a sculpture, Aristotle defines these causes as material (the artist's medium), efficient (an artistic conception translated into the sculptor's physical manipulation of his medium), formal (the form the artist strives to externalize), and final (the end-product of the creative process). This "conception of form as the end or purpose of development, in contrast to undeveloped matter," de Burgh has written, "is the fundamental thought of all Aristotle's philosophy."

Literature and Oratory Aristotle's ideas on literature and oratory are presented in two works: the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*. While the latter work focuses on the formal, linguistic, and stylistic rules for effective persuasion in verbal discussion or written argument, the hugely influential *Poetics* presents a literary theory that no subsequent critical discussion could ignore. Unfortunately, the *Poetics* exists in fragments, without the important discussions—on subjects such as catharsis and the comic—referred to in other works. Offering a full treatment of tragedy, with marginal attention to other literary genres, the *Poetics* nevertheless constitutes a comprehen-

sive philosophy of art. Like Plato, Aristotle defined art as "mimesis," or imitation, but refined the Platonic conception of art by introducing different types of imitation. According to Aristotle, epic and tragedy portray human beings as nobler than they truly are; comedy does the opposite; and the plastic arts (art that does not involve writing or composing—sculpture, for example) strive toward plain imitation. As his description of tragedy indicates, Aristotle does not separate aesthetical from ethical judgments, and his discussion of tragic characters in the *Poetics* includes explicit statements about their morality.

Metaphysics Through the Years Though the discourses in the Metaphysics are not finished works, they are sufficiently complete to show what Aristotle conceives to be the basic problems that confront a science of First Philosophy and to indicate how he thinks one should attempt to resolve these problems. The influence of this work has been enormous, both because it lays out a problem for a study of metaphysics and because it provides a persuasive way of thinking about the issues. Such medieval philosophers as Saint Thomas Aguinas (1224-1275) attempted to integrate their Christian beliefs into this framework, a synthesis that inevitably modified both the Christian dogmas and the Aristotelian system. Though modern philosophers beginning with René Descartes were anxious to reject the Aristotelian beliefs that were part of their scholastic education, much of the Aristotelian vocabulary, such as the notions of substance and attributes, remained. Many of the problems Aristotle discusses in this work remain unresolved by philosophers today. Questions about the meaning of being or the nature of universals and one's knowledge of them are still vexing philosophical issues.

Biology Aristotle contributed much to the field of biology, especially through his early work on classification. He realized that scientists had to observe an array of characteristics, not just one, as a basis for grouping, and scientists consider him to be the first person to group organisms in ways that made sense. He did not believe in evolution, but as a careful student of nature, he separated living things according to their complexity, according to a scale of nature. He assigned each increasingly complex form of life a step on a ladder. In the eighteenth century, Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) developed a system whereby all organisms were named according to genus and species, expanding and refining Aristotle's basic idea. Linnaeus said, "God creates, Linnaeus arranges." His system of classification remains in use today.

Works in Critical Context

Traditionally readers of Aristotle have been impressed most by the systematic nature of his work, and accordingly they have treated the whole of it as expressing a single body of doctrine. In recent decades, however, much scholarship has been devoted to exploring the development of Aristotle's thought. The underlying assumption of this approach is that at one time Aristotle more or less agreed with his teacher Plato, but gradually began to articulate his own views. Such studies have focused on the relative influence Plato's views seem to have had on Aristotle in a given work as a way of assessing his intellectual development.

In Werner Jaeger's book Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development (1948), the work that pioneered these developmental studies, Jaeger argues that Aristotle's thought is divided into three periods that roughly correspond to the three main periods of his life. In his years at the Academy, Aristotle's views on the soul and on ethics, which may be found in surviving fragments, are thoroughly Platonic. After Plato's death Aristotle left the Academy and began to develop his own metaphysical and epistemological views. His return to Athens and founding of the school at the Lyceum marks a third period in his development, in which he turned from the philosophical problems he inherited from Plato and embarked upon a program of empirical research. This period thus includes his biological works as well as the lost collection of political constitutions. Further research has discredited some of Jaeger's conclusions, but most studies of Aristotle's development continue to assume with Jaeger that his thought progresses steadily away from Platonism.

Poetics In Aristotle's time the influence of the *Poetics* did not extend beyond his own school, and, unlike his scientific and philosophical works, the book was rediscovered relatively late, during the Italian Renaissance. But its impact then became significant, especially upon the literature and literary criticism in France and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The principles of poetry and drama in the *Poetics* were considered by many during this period to be the correct rational principles to which literary works should conform. Much of the *Poetics* was still an authoritative source for literary principles well into the nineteenth century. The *Poetics* was used, for example, to argue for clearly defined literary genres as we know them today.

Rhetoric Many of those who practiced and taught rhetoric in Greece in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. wrote books about the art of rhetoric. Aristotle's Rhetoric is written within this tradition; but his work is the first and only systematic treatment of rhetoric in this period. It is unlikely that the Rhetoric had a significant influence as a handbook for public speaking among Aristotle's contemporaries, because by the time it was written political oratory was in decline. Though the work itself is not polemical, it no doubt served also to distinguish Aristotle's views on rhetoric from those of his rival Isocrates. Cicero and other Romans studied the Rhetoric. For them it is likely that its rhetorical principles were instructive as practical guidelines for oratory. When humanistic learning was revived during the Renaissance, the Rhetoric formed the

basis for the study of rhetoric. The Aristotelian rhetorical model is still commonly taught in introductory writing courses at the high-school and college level.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Can you think of a situation in which "the golden mean" is not the best method for determining what one should do? Since perceptions or measures of moderation will vary from person to person, what factors decide where the golden mean lies? Drawing from what you know about Aristotle's philosophy, as well as those of great thinkers throughout the ages, explain and defend your answers.
- 2. For many years, Aristotle's reputation as a philosopher was so strong that he was often referred to simply as "The Philosopher." To modern ears, his work sounds much more like science than philosophy. What are some of the differences between the kind of philosophy Aristotle participated in and the kind of philosophy practiced by philosophers in the twenty-first century?
- 3. Explain Aristotle's statement from *Poetics* that "all art is the imitation of nature." Provide evidence from literature, musical composition, and the plastic arts.

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Roberto Arlt

BORN: 1900, Buenos Aires, Argentina DIED: 1942, Buenos Aires, Argentina

NATIONALITY: Argentine GENRE: Drama, Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Rabid Plaything (1926)
The Seven Madmen (1929)
300 Millions (1932)
Porteño Etchings (1936)

Overview

Lauded by critics for exploring innovative themes in his narratives and in the theater, Roberto Arlt was one of the most influential figures in Argentine literature during the first half of the twentieth century. Premised on what he considered a breakdown of the philosophical and religious values of Western civilization, his fiction and dramas concern the plight of individuals contending with "the inevitably crumbling social edifice," frequently depicting social unrest, urban alienation, deviant behavior, sexual maladjustment, and class hostility. Arlt is also noted for his "Aguafuertes porteñas"—"etchings" of Buenos Aires life: collected essays whose language and tone are still admired by Argentine writers.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

School Dropout Arlt was born on April 2, 1900, in Buenos Aires, Argentina to European immigrants. His father had served in Bismarck's German army, while his mother was Italian. Neither spoke Spanish particularly well; German was spoken at home. Although Roberto was expelled from school at the age of eight, he read widely and published his first story at fourteen. He left home two years later and worked odd jobs while aspiring to be a writer.

From 1919 to 1920, Arlt served in the Argentine armed forces in Córdoba and attended the Naval School of Mechanics. He spent much of his free time in the taverns, especially the café La Punalada, and shady spots of Buenos Aires, making the acquaintance of the seedy patrons who would later populate his writing.

Journalist Between 1914 and 1916, at the same time he was starting his fiction-writing career, Arlt began writing for newspapers. He interned with writer and journalist Ricardo Guiraldes from 1925 to 1927 and published with Guiraldes's magazine, *Prow*. He began his journalistic work as a way to make money and to introduce himself into Argentine literary circles. However, this work turned out to be more than that. His daily columns for *El mundo*, "Aquafuertes porteñas" ("Porteño Etchings"), appeared from 1928 to 1942 (compiled first in book

form in 1936) and earned him nationwide fame. On the day his column appeared each week, *El mundo* sold twice as many copies as on other days.

The Underside of Argentina In 1929, Arlt published The Seven Madmen, which was to be his only English-language success and his most notable novel. None of his other works have been translated into English. The Seven Madmen won a municipal award, but the critics read it as a realistic book and criticized it for bad grammar and craftsmanship. The book was meant to be experimental and expressionistic. The Flamethrowers was the sequel novel to The Seven Madmen. Both The Seven Madmen and The Flamethrowers were influenced by Dostoyevsky. Both reveal the underside of Buenos Aires life, with its delinquents, prostitutes, and ruffians. In 1931, Arlt published Love of the Sorcerer, his last novel.

300 Millions With his major work in fiction behind him, in the 1930s, Arlt turned his attention to playwriting. Arlt's first play, 300 Millions, premiered on June 17, 1932, in Buenos Aires at the Teatro del Pueblo. In this play, Sofia, a poor maid from Spain, dreams about inheriting 300 million pesos to help her cope with her loneliness and the indifference of the people around her. Finally, she decides to kill herself by throwing herself in front of a tram. As a journalist, Arlt was present at just such a suicide and was so impressed by the story behind it that he had originally decided to write about it in 1927 for the newspaper Critica.

Arlt continued to write throughout the 1930s, but was increasingly exhausted by his hard living. In 1935 he was sent to Spain by *El mundo* as a correspondent, where he wrote a series of articles featuring his impressions of the country. It was one of the few times in his life that Arlt left Buenos Aires. The political climate in Spain had been increasingly tense since the adoption of a controversial new democratic Constitution in 1931; this tension was made worse in 1933, when democratic elections were at least partially ignored by the president and ruling party, leading to riots and strikes. Soon after Arlt left Spain, the country descended into a bloody civil war. His writings from the assignment were collected in *Spanish Etchings* (1936). Arlt continued to write for *El mundo* until he died of a stroke in 1942.

Works in Literary Context

Arlt was a largely self-taught, avid reader. He was particularly enamored with Russian authors, like Dostoyevsky, whose work directly influenced at least one of his protagonists. On the other hand, concerned as Arlt was with the real language of the people of Argentina, he felt little need to confine his art to the "accepted" and "formal" language of traditional literature. Indeed, Arlt's use of socalled "low" or "vulgar" language and foreign languages in his primarily Spanish-language literature was considered revolutionary and influenced innovative Spanish writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis

Borges, although his language and its impact received little critical recognition during his lifetime.

The Language of Common Culture Many of Arlt's contemporary readers admired his linguistic audacity. During the 1920s and 1930s, when academics were calling for purity and uniformity in the Spanish language, Arlt, along with other avant-garde writers, proposed the "derhetoricizing" of what they considered a pompous, florid, and stodgy literary idiom that lacked the resources for innovation and invention. Thus his characters and narrators use colloquialisms common to middle-and lower-class Spanish and the familiar form of "you," voseo, rather than the acceptable literary form of the pronoun; Arlt was the first novelist to use the familiar tense in his work. In "The Language of the Argentines," translated for the Review from his collection Aguafuertes porteñas, Arlt condemned those demanding linguistic purity, criticizing "the absurdity of trying to straightjacket in a prescriptive grammar the constantly changing, new ideas of a people."

Arlt's writing style was innovative. He was the first novelist to use the language of thieves (*lunfardo*), the language of Buenos Aireans (*porteños*), vulgarities, foreign language, Castilian Spanish, scientific language, and lyricism. He broke the literary rules of tradition at every turn and populated his work with the unpleasant and grossly urban. He also cited the new and changing ideas of people as being a reason to reject the censures of "linguistic purity." Arlt assumed that language was ever changing, even living.

Grotesque Characters As a natural outgrowth of the rough language Arlt used, his characters are often described as grotesque. Just as one example of many, consider The Manufacturer of Phantoms. This play is about an egotistical playwright, Pedro, who, convinced of his superiority, proceeds to murder his wife, since he feels that she interferes with his creativity. He is then pursued and murdered by his own literary creations. The play is influenced by Dostoyevsky's novel Crime and Punishment. The murderer has a "superman complex"—essentially, the belief that he is above the law—as does Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov; he is later plagued by his conscience as is the protagonist of Dostoyevsky's novel; and the judge in Arlt's play represents Porfiry Petrovich in Crime and Punishment. (Arlt's judge pursues Pedro after realizing that he did indeed kill his spouse.)

The literary tradition of the grotesque is particularly evident in this play. The nightmarish characters created by Pedro represent his guilty conscience, which persecutes him despite his attempts to deny its existence. There is a bizarre masquerade in which the distraught protagonist unmasks a beautiful and seductive woman who suddenly is transformed into his dead wife, and then into a series of frightening creatures each time another mask is torn from her face.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Arlt's famous contemporaries include:

William S. Burroughs (1914–1997): Influential American Beat generation writer whose works, like Arlt's, were condemned because of their strong, vulgar language.

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956): Innovative German playwright and poet.

Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969): Vietnamese revolutionary who was president of North Vietnam from 1955 until his death in 1969.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Argentine author of highly imaginative stories who is often credited as one of the earliest practitioners of magical realism.

Kenneth Slessor (1901–1971): Popular Australian poet who brought to traditional Australian poetry the influence of modernists.

Theodor Seuss Geisel (also known as Dr. Seuss) (1904–1991): American author whose fanciful worlds have entertained readers for decades.

Works in Critical Context

During his lifetime Arlt was largely ignored by the critics. On the other hand, several of his fellow left-wing writers were able to perceive the talent he possessed in communicating the inner feelings of solitude and helplessness of the antiheroes in his dramas as well as his novels. These antiheroes are similar to Arlt himself and represent many people who are unable to communicate with each other and who live within the boundaries of an indifferent and often hostile society. For other writers and critics, however, Arlt was no more than an imaginative writer who did not follow the rules of good writing.

The Seven Madmen The Seven Madmen is now considered by both the general public and literary critics to be one of the most important Argentine novels of the twentieth century. In this novel, a group of seven locos (insane people) prepare for a revolution using counterfeit money and the profits from prostitutes working in brothels. "The reader's first reaction to [The Seven Madmen] is complete disorientation," David William Foster noted in Currents in the Contemporary Argentine Novel, because "the controlling consciousness of the novel [is] Erdosain's muddled perspective on reality." Arlt's confusing narrative is a deliberate manifestation of Erdosain's own bewildered involvement with the society, whose members and plotting he does not understand. The Seven Madmen won a municipal award but, upon its release, drew the censure of critics who, failing to appreciate the novel's experimental and expressionistic tendencies, read it as a realistic book and lambasted its poor grammar,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Critics feel it is unnecessarily difficult to read some of Arlt's work, especially *The Seven Madmen*, because Arlt does not always draw a clean distinction between reality, hallucination, and fantasy. The effect of this approach is generally a submersion of the reader into the psyche of the characters whose worlds the author is exploring. The blurring of the line between fantasy and reality has become more popular in literature since Arlt's death. Here are some more works that use the technique.

Madeleine Is Sleeping (2004), work of fiction by Sarah Shunlien Bynum. This text is often referred to as a novel, but in actuality, it is less a novel and more a series of vignettes—short, powerful stories and images—that may or may not be the dreams of a young girl named Madeleine.

Naked Lunch (1959), a novel by William S. Burroughs.
Unlike the other pieces of art mentioned here, this novel is not about the connection between dreams and reality but rather the different states of consciousness experienced by drug users. Written as it was in the 1950s, the forthrightness with which the text explores drug use was quite a scandal.

Eraserhead (1977), a film directed by David Lynch. This film, like Madeleine Is Sleeping, contains a vast number of dream sequences, none of which is immediately distinguishable from the "waking life" of the protagonist. The disorienting effect is so strong that some have felt that the film is not really a film at all—in the sense that a film, above all else, tells a story—but an "experience."

composition, and craftsmanship. "If anyone ever actually believed that this novel was realistic," Paul Gray wrote in a 1984 issue of *Time*, "then life in the Argentine capitol must once have been unimaginably weird."

Arlt's subject matter and style did not fit the traditional aesthetic concept of beauty upheld by established Spanish literary critics and authors, many of whom were still extolling the virtues of cowboys on the vanishing Argentine frontier. Arlt dwelt on the least pleasant aspects of urban life. According to Foster in the Review, his novels depict, with "appalling fidelity," the horrid conditions in which Argentineans were forced to live. In the prologue to The Flamethrowers, quoted by Lee Dowling in the Review, Arlt answered and indicted his detractors, particularly the wealthy and genteel establishment writers: "It is said of me that my writing is poor. That may be.... Often I have wanted to compose a novel that would consist of panoramic scenes like Flaubert's. But today, amid the babble of an inevitably crumbling social edifice, it is impossible to linger over embroidery."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Flexibility with language is an important part of Arlt's art. His ability to use the language of the common people and to utilize aspects of the Spanish language in his novels that others had never used before mark his work as exceptional. In order to increase your own flexibility with language, take a passage from one of your textbooks—something that feels a little stuffy, a little boring—and try to rewrite it in more accessible language. Consider not just the language but also the presentation. Would the passage work better as a scene in a play, a song, or a poem? How would it look in blog form?
- 2. Both Madeleine Is Sleeping and The Seven Madmen are disorienting for the reader because they blur the line between reality and fantasy. Read Madeleine Is Sleeping. Try to determine which vignettes depict "reality" and which depict "fantasy." Based on these observations, describe the "real" Madeleine. Do the same for the protagonist in The Seven Madmen. How does this process of dissecting these texts affect your impressions of them?
- 3. Compare the conclusions of *The Manufacturer of Phantoms* and *Crime and Punishment*, by which Arlt was influenced. Which do you find more satisfying? Why?
- 4. Arlt's characters have been linked to the "grotesque"—a tradition in which abnormal-looking characters or filthy characters are described in great detail. The key here is the incredible detail used to describe the characters. After having read some Arlt, take a stab at describing, in great detail, a "grotesque" object.

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Mayi Kwei Armah

BORN: 1939, Takoradi, Gold Coast (now

Ghana)

NATIONALITY: Ghanaian, Senegalese

GENRE: Fiction
MAJOR WORKS:

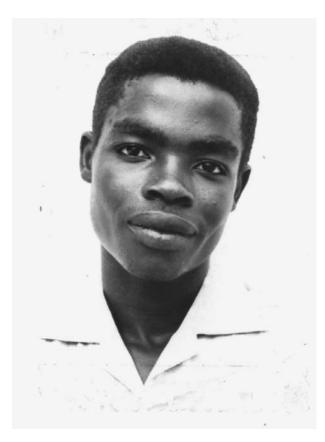
The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1968)

Fragments (1971)

Two Thousand Seasons (1973)

Overview

Ayi Kwei Armah is perhaps the most versatile, innovative, and provocative of the younger generation of postwar African novelists, and like all authors who express extreme



Ayi Kwei Armah Writer Pictures / drr.net

views in their books, he has become a controversial figure in both African and Western critical circles. The controversy has centered exclusively on the works and not on the man, about whom extremely little is known.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood Coincided with Ghanaian Independence Only twice has Armah broken his rule of silence about himself and his work, and it is to these two essays that Western critics owe nearly all of their biographical information about him.

Armah was born in 1939 in the coastal city of Takoradi, a seaport of the then-British colony of the Gold Coast. During World War II, citizens of the Gold Coast participated in the war effort, often under the auspices of the British military. In the postwar period, veterans and others who lived in the Gold Coast realized they had just fought a war against oppression and wanted to gain their own freedom. The colony was able to achieve self-government in 1951, and formal independence in 1957 when it became Ghana.

The first twenty years of Armah's life coincided with the development of his country, through a mixture of political negotiation and violent struggle, into Africa's first independent state. To complete his secondary education, Armah studied at Achimota College in Ghana. He then worked as a Radio Ghana scriptwriter, reporter, and announcer, before winning a scholarship to study in the United States in 1959, two years after Ghanaian independence.

Left Harvard to Trek Across the World Armah spent one year at a preparatory school in Massachusetts before entering Harvard University in 1960, but left college in 1963 before completing his courses and examinations. Influenced by the growing number of African revolutionary movements and perhaps by the American civil rights movement as well, Armah set out on a seventhousand-mile trip over four continents to pursue a truly "creative existence." The experience led to a physical and mental breakdown.

First Novel an International Success Returning to the United States, Armah went back to Harvard, completed his BA, and later earned an MFA at Columbia University. He spent 1967 to 1968 in Paris, where he worked as the editor of Jeune Afrique. In 1968, Armah published The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, a novel often described as existentialist. It burst upon the international literary scene and quickly became a classic of African fiction. The protagonist, simply known as "the man," is a railway clerk in Ghana during the regime of Kwame Nkrumah, the African leader who took power when Ghana gained independence from Britain.

American Experiences Informed Next Two Novels After again living in the United States and working

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Armah's famous contemporaries include:

Muammar al-Gaddafi (1942–): Libyan leader and advocate of pan-Africanism and pan-Arabism; widely respected throughout Africa for the stability of his rule, but, until recently, considered by the West to be a sponsor of terrorism.

Mariama Ba (1929–1981): Muslim Senegalese author and feminist; her work exposes the discrimination and imbalance of power that African women experience in daily life.

Breyten Breytenbach (1939–): White South African poet and advocate for minority rights; he has been exiled and imprisoned for his political views.

Frantz Fanon (1925–1961): Writer and scholar from Martinique, West Indies; his works critiquing colonization strongly influenced Armah as well as many anticolonial liberation activists.

Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972): First prime minister (1952–1966) of Ghana after its independence and influential pan-Africanist, promoting African unity and traditional African values; while he was out of the country, his government was overthrown by a coup.

at the University of Massachusetts, Armah returned to Africa in 1970, where he continued to write while holding teaching, scriptwriting, translating, and editing jobs. He first lived in Tanzania, where he taught African literature and creative writing. From 1972 to 1976, he was teaching the same subjects in Lesotho. During this period, he wrote a number of important novels as many independent countries in Africa continued to struggle to define themselves as political entities.

Like "the man," the protagonists of Armah's next two novels are alienated in their respective societies and, like Armah, they have studied in the United States. *Fragments* (1971) tells the story of a "been-to," (someone who has been to the United States) who is hounded into madness by his family because of what he brings back from his stay in America. It is not the instant return of material possessions and prestige that they expect of him, but a moral idealism that interferes with the selfish materialism they have taken over from Western culture.

Why Are We So Blest? (1972) is the story of Modin, an African student studying at Harvard. He leaves school and returns to Africa with his white girlfriend Aimee to participate in a revolutionary struggle. Modin is ultimately destroyed in Armah's complex tale, which explores, among other things, sexual relationships and the hierarchy of race as Modin is subjugated and sped to destruction by Aimee.

Turned to "Historical" Novels In Two Thousand Seasons (1973), however, Armah began to portray entire African communities in a historical context—and in their struggles, these communities would succeed. The novel, which calls for the reclamation of Africa's traditional values, covers one thousand years of African history. The Healers (1978), Armah's next novel, is the story of a young protagonist, Densu, who studies to become a healer at a time when Africa is being ravaged by a virulent plague of non-African origin.

Wrote from Senegal Since the publication of this novel, Armah has advocated the establishment of an African publishing industry and of an African literature in African languages, rather than European languages. Armah returned to the United States to teach at the University of Wisconsin in 1979. He later went back to Africa and made his home in Dakar, Senegal, where he focused primarily on his writing.

In 1995 came the novel *Osiris Rising*, which was published only in Senegal, as was *Kmt: In the House of Life* (2002). Armah continues to live and work in Senegal.

Works in Literary Context

Influences and "Un-African" Style Armah's combination of an African background with an American education has made the question of the literary sources of his fiction a difficult one. During the 1970s, many Western critics detected European influences, including that of French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, Irish postmodernist Samuel Beckett, French "nouveau roman" pioneer Alain Robbe-Grillet, and innovative French writer Louis-Ferdinand Celine.

In the case of Armah's third novel, Why Are We So Blest?, black American literature and polemic were added to the list of influences. The divergence of Armah's visionary, symbolic fictional modes from the realist mainstream of African fiction has provoked charges from African critics, notably Chinua Achebe, that his characterization and style are "un-African" and have more in common with expatriate fiction about Africa written by Europeans than with African writing.

Importance of Ritual and Tradition However, Armah's figurative treatment of the intricacies of ritual process gives his work an unexpected and seldom-noticed common ground with work from which his own art has been thought far removed, such as the tradition-oriented early plays of Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian writer, and with the writing of authors who have adopted a hostile critical stance toward him, such as the Ghanaian writer Kofi Awoonor.

African commentators—notably Solomon O. Iyasere and D. S. Izevbaye—who adhere to more inclusive concepts of traditionalism have drawn attention to the connection of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* both to African fable and to the personifications of the oral tradition, and to *Fragments*'s striking simulation of the

oracular and editing devices of the narrative style of the griots, or traditional oral storytellers.

Reflections of African Society In his first three novels, Armah also wrote about the struggles, alienation, and failures of individuals in contemporary African society. In the Ghana of The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, for example, filth and excrement are everywhere, serving in the novel as metaphors for the corruption that permeates society. The man, however, resists this corruption and fights the "gleam" that causes almost all Ghanaians to pursue material wealth and power through bribery and other foul deeds. With Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers, Armah turned to more historical African concerns and highlighted the need to return to traditional African culture as a model for the future, something he tried to do in his own influential life and work.

Works in Critical Context

While Armah is considered one of Africa's leading prose stylists writing in English, his works have met with a somewhat mixed critical reaction, though many reviewers have praised his stylistic innovations. The author is usually appreciated for the strength of his convictions and desire to promote the improvement of the African continent and those who live there as well.

Early Works Lauded by Critics Critics generally praised Armah's first three works, especially The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born; many compared Armah's writing ability with that of such celebrated Western writers as James Joyce and Joseph Conrad. Charles R. Larson, in The Emergence of African Fiction, describes the book as "a novel which burns with passion and tension, with a fire so strongly kindled that in every word and every sentence one can almost hear and smell the sizzling of the author's own branded flesh." In the Journal of Commonwealth Literature, James Booth describes it as "the most powerful work of a novelist of genius." But other critics—notably Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe—accused Armah of portraying Africa in a European manner.

Early critical allegations that there are few "Africanisms" in Armah's first two novels and that the books do not draw upon Ghanaian settings, speech, or history, have not held up under close investigation, however. These books are so imbued with surviving ritual forms, ceremonial motifs, local mythologies, and residual ancestral beliefs that traditional West African culture is always powerfully, if remotely, present, both in its superior ethical imperatives and its inherent deficiencies.

Mixed Reception for "Historical" Novels Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers have had a mixed reception. These two historical novels have been widely hailed by African critics as evolving a major new style for African literature. Some Western critics, notably Gerald Moore and Bernth Lindfors, have expressed reservations about them, however, and there seems to be a consensus

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Colonialism is never far from the surface in Armah's novels. Here are some other works that examine colonialism and its effects.

Colonialism and Neo-colonialism (1964), by Jean-Paul Sartre. This classic collection of writings by the French philosopher examines his country's colonization of Algeria, a microcosm of the West's colonization of developing countries.

The Glass Palace (2000), by Amitav Ghosh. This epic novel sweeps from Burma and Malaya from 1885 to the present, tracing the history of colonialism across those countries

The Harbor Boys (2006), by Hugo Hamilton. This comingof-age memoir tells of the author's struggle to define himself in 1960s Dublin, Ireland, as the son of a German mother and a vehemently anti-English Irish father.

In My Father's House (1993), by Kwame Anthony Appiah. This book of essays by the Ghanaian philosopher examines modern African identity, cultural assumptions, and postcolonial African culture.

The Open Sore of a Continent (1997), by Wole Soyinka. This nonfiction book by the Nobel Prize—winning Nigerian writer examines the crisis in Nigeria brought on by its governing dictatorship.

in the West that they show signs of reduced inspiration and declining artistic achievement. Robert Fraser, on the other hand, has argued that their apparent radical line of departure is really a curve in an arc of continuous development and achievement from the early novels, and he has fewer reservations about the method and manner by which the beautiful ones are finally "born" in Armah's fiction.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Armah is known to keep fairly quiet about his personal life and work. Many of his novels, however, draw heavily from his own life experiences as a Ghanaian and as an Ivy League student in the United States. Compare Armah's novel *Fragments* with the known details of the author's life. What elements are taken directly from his own experiences? Which appear to be largely fictional? Why do you think he chose to create a fictional work instead of an autobiography?
- 2. Armah's recent novels have only been published in Senegal. Do you think that a writer should always aim to reach as many readers as possible? What are some reasons why a writer might choose to target a smaller audience?

- 3. Read the excerpt from Armah's essay "One Writer's Education." What does he mean when he calls writing "the least parasitic option open to me"?
- 4. Armah advocates using a common African language as the main language in Africa instead of European languages. Using the Internet and your library's resources, research Chinua Achebe and Breyten Breytenbach, two African writers who have chosen to write in "hostile" languages in order to reclaim them. Write an essay analyzing their view and contrasting it with Armah's view. Explain whose view you agree with more, using specific reasons to back up your argument.

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Matthew Arnold

BORN: 1822, Laleham on the Thames, England

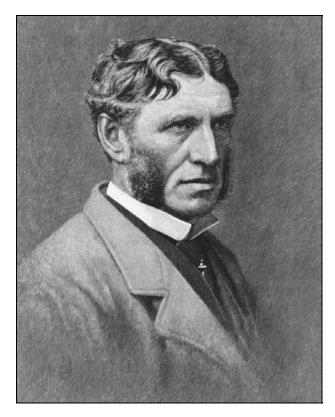
DIED: 1888, Liverpool, England

NATIONALITY: English
GENRE: Poetry, criticism

MAJOR WORKS:
Poems (1853)
New Poems (1867)
"Dover Beach" (1867)
Culture and Anarchy (1869)
Literature and Dogma (1873)

Overview

Matthew Arnold's work deals with the difficulty of preserving personal values in a world drastically transformed by industrialism, science, and democracy. His poetry often expresses a sense of unease with modernity. He asserted his greatest influence through his prose writings as a social critic, calling for a renewal of art and culture. His forceful literary criticism, based on his humanistic belief in the value of balance and clarity in literature, significantly shaped modern theory.



Matthew Arnold Arnold, Matthew, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Child of the Headmaster Arnold was the eldest son of Dr. Thomas Arnold, an influential educator who became, in 1828, headmaster of the prestigious Rugby School. His family took many pleasant holidays in England's Lake District where they became acquainted with William Wordsworth. Much of the imagery in Arnold's landscape poetry was inspired by the locale.

Arnold's poetic landscapes also are indebted to the region around Oxford University, which Arnold attended after being offered a scholarship in 1840. At Oxford he met Arthur Hugh Clough, who became his close friend and correspondent. After leaving Oxford, Arnold took a temporary post as assistant master at Rugby for one term before accepting a position in London as private secretary to the politician Lord Lansdowne.

Success as a Poet While holding this position, Arnold wrote some of his finest poems. He published them, signed with the initial A., in two separate volumes: The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems (1849) and Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems (1852). Arnold published the bulk of his poetry, including Poems in 1853, in the eight years following the publication of The Strayed Reveller. However, his best-known poem, "Dover Beach," was not published until 1867. The poem, often viewed as a meditation on the importance of love, describes a locale on the coast of England that Arnold is said to have visited in 1851.

Oxford Lectures At the age of thirty-four, Arnold was elected to the poetry chair at Oxford University, an appointment that required him to deliver several lectures each year. Traditionally, the lectures had been read in Latin, but Arnold decided to present his in English. He used the occasion of his first lecture in 1857 to discuss his views about the worth of classical literature. In the first lecture, entitled "On the Modern Element in Literature," later published in Macmillan's magazine (1869), Arnold advocates a liberal education that features wide-ranging knowledge and the use of the comparative method to build knowledge and to shape understanding.

Arnold's next major prose work, *On Translating Homer*, was a series of three lectures given at Oxford in 1860 and 1861. In these essays, he evaluates selected translations of Homer, noting the strengths and weaknesses of each in an attempt to establish the characteristics of a well-written translation. They are lively introductions to classical poetry and urge English writers to imitate Homer's "grand style."

Social Criticism In his prose works, Arnold pursued many of the same ideas he had introduced in his poems, especially man's need for spiritual and intellectual fulfillment in a materialistic, provincial society. In his Oxford lectures and in his education reports, Arnold suggested a

single solution to humankind's problems—a liberal education. As an essayist, Arnold continued to address the subject of intellectual and spiritual growth.

Of the several books that Arnold wrote on politics and sociology, the most important is *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). He criticizes nineteenth-century English politicians for their lack of purpose and their excessive concern with the machinery of society. The English people—and the narrow-minded middle class in particular—lack "sweetness and light," a phrase that Arnold borrowed from Jonathan Swift. England can only be saved by the development of "culture," which for Arnold means the free play of critical intelligence and a willingness to question all authority and to make judgments in a leisurely and disinterested way.

The subject of four of Arnold's books was the threat to religion posed by science and historical scholarship. The most important of these is *Literature and Dogma* (1873). He argues that the Bible has the importance of a supremely great literary work, and as such it cannot be discredited by charges of historical inaccuracy. And the Church, like any other time-honored social institution, must be reformed with care and with a sense of its historical importance to English culture.

Arnold focused on social and literary topics during the last ten to twelve years of his life, offering more elaborate or definitive statements of his views on matters that had long interested him. In 1883 and 1886 he toured the United States and gave lectures in which he tried to win Americans to the cause of culture. Many of Arnold's late essays deal with literature and, more specifically, with sound criticism of literature. The best known of his later collections is *Essays in Criticism, Second Series*, which Arnold began discussing with his publisher in January of 1888, but which was not actually printed until November of that year, seven months after Arnold's sudden death from a heart attack.

Works in Literary Context

Emptiness One of the dominant themes of Arnold's poems is that of the intellectual and spiritual void he believed to be characteristic of nineteenth-century life. Looking about him, he witnessed the weakening of traditional areas of authority, namely the dwindling power of the upper classes and the diminishing authority of the Church. He believed man had no firm base to cling to, nothing to believe in, nothing to be sustained by.

Arnold's early poetry, such as *Alaric at Rome* (1840), had the brooding tone that would become characteristic of his mature work. In "To Marguerite—Continued," he concludes that the individual is essentially isolated. The theme of man's alienation and longing for refuge is echoed in later poems such as "Rugby Chapel" and "Dover Beach."

Influences For Arnold, the German poet Heinrich Heine truly possessed the critical spirit. Heine cherished the French spirit of enlightenment and waged "a life and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Arnold's famous contemporaries include:

Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919): American industrialist and businessman; made his fortune in the steel industry Charles Darwin (1809–1882): English naturalist who, with A. R. Wallace, first introduced the idea of natural selection

Charles Dickens (1812–1870): English novelist and journalist, whose writing often commented on the lives of the poor

George Eliot (1819–1880): Pen name of Mary Ann Evans; English novelist who emphasized realistic plots and characters

Karl Marx (1818–1883): Prussian philosopher and revolutionary; developed the theory of communism with Friedrich Engels; author of *Das Kapital* (1867), criticizing capitalism.

George Sand (1804–1876): Pen name of Amantine Dupin; French novelist and feminist; stated that women should have the same rights within marriage as men

death battle with Philistinism," the narrowness Arnold saw typified in the British. Arnold felt that the English romantics had failed to reinstitute the critical spirit. The German romantic Heine, however, he believed, was able to accomplish what the English romantics could not.

Despite his criticism, however, the two romantics Arnold held in highest esteem were Lord Byron and William Wordsworth. He praised Byron at length for his stand on social injustice, and ranked Wordsworth only after William Shakespeare, Molière, John Milton, and Johann von Goethe in his list of the premier poets of "the last two or three centuries."

Works in Critical Context

Poetry As E. D. H. Johnson has pointed out, Arnold tried "to reaffirm the traditional sovereignty of poetry as a civilizing agent." Arnold believed that great art, functioning as a civilizing agent to enrich the intellectual and spiritual life of man, had universal application. But his views were not the same as those of his contemporaries, who felt that art should have immediate, practical application to everyday experience.

Arnold's first collection, *The Strayed Reveller* (1849) was a failure; sales were poor and the book was withdrawn. *Empedocles on Etna*, and Other Poems (1852), after a sale of only fifty copies, also was withdrawn. Critics charged that Arnold's first two volumes of poems did not consistently deal with contemporary life. Charles Kingsley's comments in 1849 are representative: "The man

who cannot...sing the present age, and transfigure it into melody, or who cannot, in writing of past ages, draw from them some eternal lesson about this one, has no right to be versifying at all."

Poems (1853) included works from the two earlier collections as well as new ones, notably "Sohrab and Rustum" and "The Scholar Gypsy." That volume contains his famous preface outlining why he did not include the title poem from Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems. Arnold declared that it did not fulfill the requirements of a good poem and therefore did not qualify as meaningful art. Alba Warren explains that "great poetry for Arnold is not lyric, subjective, personal; it is above all objective and impersonal." H. F. Lowry says of Arnold that "[t]he deepest passion of his life was for what is permanent in the human mind and the human heart," and that he found this in classical literature.

Because, perhaps, of the mournful tone of his verse, Arnold was not a popular poet in his day. However, many of his poems—most notably "The Scholar-Gypsy," "Empedocles on Etna," "Thyrsis," and "Dover Beach"—are still studied and respected as some of the best verse of the Victorian period. T. S. Eliot stated that "the valuation of the Romantic poets, in academic circles, is still very largely that which Arnold made."

"Culture and Its Enemies" In "Culture and Its Enemies," published in the Cornhill Magazine in 1867 and later included in Culture and Anarchy, Arnold continues to wage war against complacency. But his views were met with considerable scorn. Readers claimed that he was an elitist, a snob, and they labeled his ideas inadequately developed and impractical. Henry Sidgwick found the essay "over-ambitious, because it treats of the most profound and difficult problems of individual and social life with an airy dogmatism that ignores their depth and difficulty."

Arnold responded to his critics in a series of five essays published in 1868, entitled "Anarchy and Authority." In the essay series Arnold continues his championship of culture by stressing the present need for it.

Essays on Religion Arnold also championed religion as a profound cultural force. However, Ruth Roberts shows that Arnold is guilty of "overingenuity" in his religious works. His argument is not as disinterested as he claims, and he often glosses over biblical passages inconsistent with his position. For Arnold, the Bible was literature and must be read as such. J. C. Shairp, a contemporary of Arnold's, argued, "They who seek religion for culture-sake are aesthetic, not religious." The same charge was later echoed by T. S. Eliot, who found that Arnold had confused "poetry and morals in the attempt to find a substitute for religious faith."

Basil Willey summarized Arnold's view in *Literature* and *Dogma* as being a "false approach to the Bible which seeks to extract dogma from poetry." Unsurprisingly, *Literature* and *Dogma* stirred even more controversy

in his focus from his earlier works to the works written in exile. The collection involves fifteen different translators covering six different genres, and yet is considered by most critics to be a seamless and smoothly toned final edition. *New York Times Book Review* contributor James Polk praised the collection for its "singular and surprising nature" and asserted that the best stories "lead relentlessly toward one apparent ending before abruptly shifting direction and winding up in a totally unexpected place."

Responses to Literature

- To get a better understanding of the localist nature of Benedetti's writing, conduct group research on Uruguay and its capital city Montevideo. Consider its population, geography, and history, and look for parallels between what you find and Benedetti's early work.
- 2. Class distinctions are an important part of Uruguay's history and a major feature in many of Benedetti's works. Find an example of a historical event where two classes were in opposition, such as the French Revolution. What are the characteristics of each class? What is the core argument? Which "side" do you see more clearly represented in Benedetti's writing?
- 3. Put Benedetti in the larger context of Uruguayan literature. What literary movements were significant to this culture? What other writers are included in his time, area, and genres? What kinds of literature existed and which were most valued? How is Benedetti considered one of the most popular Uruguayan writers?
- 4. Benedetti lived and wrote in a most revolutionary time for Uruguay. But the country has a history of unrest that reaches much further back than the coup d'état of 1973. Research political unrest in Uruguay during the coup, and consider the ways in which those earlier periods have been reported. Were the times chronicled by literary figures? Were the newspaper circuits the sole method for communicating events? Is there currently any evidence of journals, underground papers, or other writings that reveal the history as Benedetti and his fellows revealed the conditions in the 1970s?

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Video: Response to Mario Benedetti's No te salves: Conciliar el Sueño. Retrieved February 24, from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cK5266ayT0. Added on May 17, 2007.

Mongo Beti

BORN: 1932, M'balmayo, Cameroon DIED: 2001, Douala, Cameroon NATIONALITY: Cameroonian

GENRE: *Novels*MAJOR WORKS:

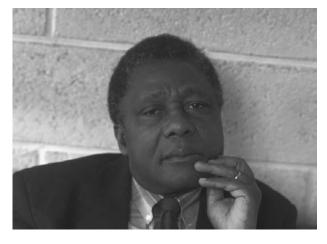
The Poor Christ of Bomba (1956)

King Lazarus (1958)

Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness (1974)

Overview

Alexandre Biyidi, who published under the name Mongo Beti, was one of the first French-speaking African novelists to combine humor and perceptive social criticism. He



Mongo Beti © Bassouls Sophie / Corbis Sygma

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Beti's famous contemporaries include:

John Updike (1932–): Pulitzer Prize–winning American writer who chronicles the Protestant middle class.

V. S. Naipaul (1932–): Trinidadian-born British writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001.

Shintaro Ishihara (1932–): Japanese author and politician who won the Akutagawa Prize for Best New Author of the Year in 1956.

Manuel Puig (1932–1990): Argentinian novelist whose best-known work, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1976), was made into a film and a Broadway musical.

Susan Sontag (1933–2004): American writer and political activist who created numerous controversies with her literary and political statements.

Norman Rush (1933–): American novelist whose stories are set in Botswana.

is widely recognized as a master among African writers of all languages.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From Cameroon to France Born in the small town of M'balmayo, located in the French-controlled territory of Cameroon on the western coast of Africa, Beti's given name was Alexandre Biyidi. Beti was educated in local French missionary schools until his expulsion for unknown reasons at the age of fourteen. He then attended the lycée in Cameroon's capital, Yaoundé. He went to France in 1951, studying first at the University of Aix-en-Provence and then at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he received his *licence*, or BA, with honors. Later, Beti began teaching French literature, classical Greek, and Latin in various lycées in France.

While he was a student at Aix, Beti wrote and published his first novel, *Cruel City*, under the pseudonym Eza Boto. Beti's often controversial reputation began with three works published in close succession between 1956 and 1958: *The Poor Christ of Bomba, Mission Accomplished*, and *King Lazarus*. Although these works were well received by critics, they made little money for their author, and Beti found it necessary to teach in order to support himself and his family.

As a committed Marxist, or believer in the rights of the workers and the goal of a class-free society, he refused to return to Cameroon when it achieved independence in 1960. He was hostile to the new Yaoundé regime of President Ahmadou Ahidjo, who had structured the new country's government to provide himself with far-reaching

power and silence his critics. Beti instead remained in France with his family, devoting himself to teaching.

Topical Criticism In 1972 Beti published a political essay, "The Plundering of Cameroon." In it, he criticized the Yaoundé regime for remaining under the control of the French long after Cameroon's formal liberation in 1960. For years Beti had written essays on current affairs in Africa, but with "The Plundering of Cameroon" he shifted from a historical perspective to an essentially topical one. Soon after, Beti published two novels, Remember Ruben and Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness. In Remember Ruben, Beti emphasized the corruption of national politics through glimpses of the harshness of individual lives, a theme he explored again in Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness, a critique of the slavelike conditions of the modern woman in contemporary Africa

Return to Cameroon Beti visited Cameroon in 1991 after a self-imposed absence of thirty-two years. When he retired from teaching in 1994, he returned permanently to Cameroon, where he opened a bookshop in the capital to encourage literacy and provide an opportunity for authors to sell their critical texts. During this period, Beti supported an opposition political party, and the government attempted to suppress his activities. He published several novels in response, but his final trilogy remained unfinished at his death on October 8, 2001.

Works in Literary Context

In his early novels, Beti unleashed his sense of humor to create a series of harsh but comic indictments of French colonial rule in Cameroon. Later, in *Remember Ruben* (1974) and *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness* 1974), Beti criticized the corruption he witnessed in Cameroon during the years of independence.

Disdain for the Colonial System When it was first published, The Poor Christ of Bomba was banned outright in French Africa and was controversial in France, where critics defended the French record in Africa against Beti's account. Beti followed with Mission Accomplished, the story of young, Western-educated Jean-Marie Medza and his mission to retrieve the wayward wife of a relation in "primitive" Kala. In King Lazarus, Beti's next offering, a missionary persuades the polygamous tribal chief of the Essazam to convert to Christianity and give up all but one of his wives. The twenty-two former wives and their families, outraged at the breach of tribal custom as well as at the rudeness of turning the women out of their home, protest to the French colonial authorities. In the confrontation between the civil administration, the missionary, and the tribal chief, Beti exposes the vices of each party.

The Unexpected Comedic Elements of Colonialism While Beti's early work has been called "astonishingly varied," there are at least two elements common to all the novels: humor and disdain for the colonial system. This mixture of comedy and contempt had little precedent in the history of African fiction. As Fernando Lambert maintained in a 1976 *Yale French Studies* essay, "By adopting two antithetical levels of representation—the tragedy of the fate forced upon Africans by colonization and the comedy of characters and situations made possible by such a state of affairs—Beti establishes a form of dialectic which allows the necessary demystification of colonial pretensions and also the affirmation of Negro humor.... Beti is the first to open this path to African literature."

Works in Critical Context

Many critics regard Beti as one of the greatest Frenchlanguage novelists of Africa. As critic Robert P. Smith Jr. concluded in *CLA Journal*, Beti is "one of the best of the contemporary black African novelists who seek to promote true liberty in Africa and to insure a lasting dignity for her."

Cruel City Beti has repudiated his first novel, Cruel City. This work is generally considered weak and melodramatic, but Gerald Moore, writing in 1980, claimed that it "is a rather bad novel, but it is manifestly not the work of a bad writer." Along the same lines, Clive Wake suggested the "substantial work" needs more than a "cursory reading," directing attention to a story that may seem "awkward and contrived" at first, but demands another look. He praised the "evocative quality" of Beti's language and imagery, particularly those that detail the "evils of colonialism."

Controversy and a Break in Writing Beti's often controversial reputation began with three works published in close succession between 1956 and 1958: The Poor Christ of Bomba, Mission Accomplished, and King Lazarus. These early works were generally warmly received by critics, though Beti made little money from them and was forced to continue his teaching to make a living. After King Lazarus, he stopped writing novels for more than a decade.

Criticism of Postindependence Africa Beti returned to the novel with Remember Ruben and Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness, both published in 1974. In Remember Ruben, Beti emphasized the corruption of national politics through glimpses of the harshness of individual lives, a theme he explored again in Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness, a critique of the slavelike conditions of the modern woman in contemporary Africa. Critics praised both novels, commending Beti's new focus on African independence. Writing in CLA Journal in 1976, Smith maintained: "Mongo Beti has broken his silence, not to criticize the colonial past as was his custom, but to accuse the present period of independence and self-government, and to attempt to pave the way to a better future for Africa and Africans."

Responses to Literature

1. One critic has noted that Beti sought "to promote true liberty in Africa." Read one of Beti's novels.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Beti's works are consistently critical of the colonial system in Africa, both before and after independence. Here are some other works that are similarly critical:

Things Fall Apart (1958), a novel by Chinua Achebe. This novel depicts tribal life in Nigeria both before and after the coming of the colonial system.

Concierto barroc (1974), a novel by Alejo Carpentier. This novel tells the story of the consciousness raising of an upper-class Mexican during the colonial period of the eighteenth century.

Waiting for the Rain (1975), a novel by Charles Mongoshi. This novel explores the effects of settler colonialism on African lives and culture through the story of an extended family living on a "native reservation" in Rhodesia.

Then write an essay in which you discuss how this novel reflects or aids this cause. Or, in contrast, write about how this particular novel seems to work against Beti's political and social goals. Use specific examples from the book to support your opinions.

- 2. Beti lived in a self-imposed exile from Cameroon for over thirty years. With a group of your classmates, discuss what impact this absence might have had on his writings about his homeland. Also explore the ways in which his distance from the subject of his novels may have helped or hindered his writing. Use specific examples from Beti's work to support your ideas.
- 3. At the end of his life, Beti became politically active in his native country. Write an essay that either supports or opposes the practice of novelists turning directly to politics to have an impact on the world.
- 4. Beti uses humor to show his disdain for the European system of colonialism in Africa. Write an essay analyzing his use of humor, discussing the ways that it detracts from his criticisms and the ways that it makes them more effective.

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Adolfo Bioy Casares

BORN: 1914, Buenos Aires, Argentina DIED: 1999, Buenos Aires, Argentina

NATIONALITY: Argentinian

GENRE: *Fiction*MAJOR WORKS:

The Invention of Morel (1940)

A Plan for Escape (1945)

The Dream of Heroes (1954)

The Adventures of a Photographer in La Plata (1985)

Memories (1994)

Overview

Argentinean author Adolfo Bioy Casares inspired generations of Latin American readers and writers with his elegant humor and prophetic imagination. Bioy (as he is most widely known) began writing as the young colleague of the inimitable Jorge Luis Borges, but went on to considerable acclaim in his own right. The writer's many awards include the prestigious Premio Miguel de Cervantes de Literatura, which he won in 1991.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Comfortable Upbringing in Buenos Aires Adolfo Bioy Casares was born in Buenos Aires on September 15, 1914, the only child of wealthy parents. His father, Adolfo Bioy, descendant of a French family from Béarn (the southwestern region of France often in the background of his son's stories), was the author of two volumes of memoirs. He married Marta Casares, considered a great beauty in her day, who came from a well-established family, owners of the largest dairy chain in the La Martona region of Argentina. It was through her



Adolfo Bioy Casares Bioy Casares, Adolfo, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

friendship with the Ocampo family that her son, at seventeen, would meet his wife-to-be—Victoria Ocampo's sister, the writer Silvina Ocampo—and his literary mentor Borges. Rincón Viejo, the Bioy family ranch in Pardo in the province of Buenos Aires, was to give Bioy and Borges their first pretext to write in collaboration. This collaboration led to many stories, translations, anthologies, and film scripts, and to the occasional invention of a third writer (with several pseudonyms) christened, by the Uruguayan critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Biorges."

Bioy, Borges, and Beginnings The familiar image of Bioy as disciple and collaborator of Borges placed him in the Latin American canon under the shadow of the maestro. Even though Borges once called Bioy the secret master who led him out of his experimentation with baroque metaphors into classical prose, Borges's message was, as always, double: master in the sense that children teach their parents. It was Borges who told Bioy in an early conversation: "If you want to write, don't mess around with publishing companies or literary magazines. Just read and write." Despite this dictum, Borges and Bioy would initiate in 1936 a short-lived magazine and press called *Out of Time*, challenging the approach of

traditional literary criticism. Borges's advice still reverberates in a recent story by Bioy, "Trio" (1986), where a friend advises the narrator: "When you spend too much time analyzing your projects, you don't do them. The best way to write is to write."

Borges and Bioy were more than mentor and disciple; they were lifelong friends whose ingenious and impassioned discussions of literature were mutually nourishing. Bioy has said that while he and Borges shared a similar and largely Victorian literary taste, each had different literary fondnesses. Borges favored the epic, as his enthusiasm for American poet Walt Whitman and his admiration for compadres (local gangsters) testify, while Bioy tended toward the lyrical and writers such as Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine.

Continuing Success Bioy wrote and published six books before 1940, but he considers (as do his critics) that his real literary production began with *The Invention of Morel* (1940). To entertain friends in later years he would often read one of his early attempts at writing. He would claim it was written by some young writer, read a section that would be sure to produce mocking laughter, and then reveal that he was the author. Also in 1940, Bioy married Silvina Ocampo, sister of Victoria Ocampo, a friend who had introduced him to Borges.

In 1946, the military-led government of Argentina came under the control of Juan Perón, a leader beloved by many lower-class Argentineans but viewed as an anti-intellectual dictator by those skeptical of his policies. Under Perón's regime, many writers suffered persecution for expressing views that Perón did not agree with; Casares's friend Borges was one of these. However, even though he socialized with many famous writers and intellectuals, Casares remained aloof from the world of politics.

Bioy lived a basically private life among friends and family in the same apartment in Buenos Aires for many years, in an elegant neighborhood near the Plaza de Francia. In his studio there he composed *The Invention of Morel, The Dream of Heroes*, and *Asleep in the Sun* (1973). At his beach house in Mar del Plata, he wrote *Diary of the War of the Pig* (1969). Bioy was awarded the Premio Cervantes—the most prestigious prize in the Hispanic literary world—in Spain, and the Premio Alfonso Reyes in Mexico. He died in 1999 in Buenos Aires.

Works in Literary Context

Humor and irony are in all of Bioy's writings, and critics note that he uses these devices to couch his often serious commentary on aging, death, love, and artistic expression. His widely acclaimed *Invention of Morel* satirically examines the nature of love and human relationships and the role of the artist in contemporary society.

Isolation and Estrangement The plot of *The Invention of Morel* transports love into the realm of science fiction and away from Argentina to an unknown and supposedly deserted island—much as Bioy, in his own life, needed to remove himself from the subjectivity of his immediate

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bioy's famous contemporaries include:

Octavio Paz (1914–1998): Mexican writer, poet, and diplomat who won the 1990 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Otto Preminger (1906–1986): Austro-Hungarian director who directed more than thirty-five Hollywood feature films in a five-decade career.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): One of Argentina's most beloved authors, Borges is famous for his intricate, intellectually impressive stories.

Eva Perón (1919–1952): Wife of Juan Perón and former First Lady of Argentina, "Evita" was a much-loved political figure and feminist organizer.

Argentine reality to gain aesthetic distance. The protagonist, a fugitive from Venezuela who writes a diary, discovers strange inhabitants who turn out to be three-dimensional movie images. His typically bungling antihero (Bioy's creation of characters is inspired by a mixture of silent-movie comedy and Kafkaesque absurdity) falls madly in love with a woman named, allusively, Faustine. After learning how to activate the machine that has captured these images, he proceeds to place himself near her, making it look as if a relationship exists between the two, though she is unaware of his existence. His actions are tragic, because Faustine and now the narrator, like all who are photographed by Morel's machine, are dead.

Like Morel, the narrator is the artist who ultimately sacrifices his life for art. The book can also be read as Bioy's homage to cinema and photography as he is an aficionado of both. Whatever the interpretation, what remains is a text that speaks of other texts, from *The Island of Dr. Moreau* to a tradition of utopian literature going back to Plato's *Atlantis*.

Another highly praised novel, *A Plan for Escape* (1945), also takes place on an island—a recurring motif in Bioy's stories, suggesting isolation and estrangement. Here the protagonist finds prisoners undergoing a surgical procedure, which completely reverses their perceptions of reality. In effect, the protagonist becomes the prisoner of a fantasy world and struggles to escape to reality.

The Fantastic Both science fiction and detective genres, along with a metaphysical treatise, make up what Bioy first called the hybrid genre of the fantastic. In his May 1942 review (in *Sur*) of Borges's first volume of stories, *The Garden of Forking Paths* Bioy wrote: "Borges, like the philosophers of Tlon, has discovered the literary possibilities of metaphysics." Science fiction provides the fantastic invention or event; the detective genre contributes the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In many works of fantasy the narrator is unreliable—either dreaming, hallucinating, or just oblivious to reality. Here are a few more works in which the narrator's perceptions might not be as trustworthy as they initially seem:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), a novel by Lewis Carroll. On a lazy summer's day, Alice falls down a rabbit hole and meets a host of strange characters. The Island of Dr. Moreau (1896), a novel by H. G. Wells. After a shipwreck, a man washes up on a mysterious island that may or may not be inhabited by a mad scientist

Naked Lunch (1959), a novel by William S. Burroughs. In this Beat Generation novel, a man finds himself in Tangier in a place called Interzone that is probably a figment of his imagination.

intricate yet elegantly methodical plot. Both genres have also served as modes of social and political satire.

In *The Invention of Morel*, the encounter between the "real-life" fugitive and the "magical" Faustine (and the supernatural machine that created her) makes Bioy's work paradigmatic of the fantastic. But allegorical interpretations are tempting. The novella has been interpreted as a parable of the relationship between reader and text: The nameless narrator-protagonist encounters the fictional characters invented by the mad scientist Morel and interpolates himself—his interpretation—upon them.

Bioy's elegant textual machines, like the invention of the mad scientist Morel, are works of passion, expressing a desire for eternal love and a poignant failure to counter mortality. The futuristic machine as the pathetic or sinister vehicle of human hopes in this century of technology is both a comic and a terrifying motif throughout Bioy's work: he compares humankind to a mechanical monkey on a bicycle that gradually rusts away and wears down with use.

Works in Critical Context

Critics disagree in their assessment of Bioy's writings. Several have noted that his works lack originality, often drawing their adventure plots from the works of H. G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe, and Robert Louis Stevenson, as well as from detective and science fiction stories. Other scholars, however, have maintained that Bioy's creative reworking of the elements of linear time and space imbues his works with a surrealistic quality that distinguishes them from the fiction of his predecessors. Many agree, however, that Bioy's ironic humor makes his writings both appealing and memorable.

The Invention of Morel Bioy's meticulously wrought novella of 120 pages was received with acclaim and brought him recognition beyond the borders of the Sur group as well as the 1940 Buenos Aires municipal prize for literature. When translated into French in 1953, his narrative device of two lovers coexisting spatially in two different temporal dimensions inspired Alain Robbe-Grillet's script for Alain Resnais's film Last Year at Marienbad (1961). Aside from several movie and television versions made in France, Italy, and Argentina, The Invention of Morel has become a cult reference as, for example, in Argentine Hector Subiella's metaphysical film Man Facing Southeast (1985). At the same time, among the proponents of realism, the book caused Bioy to acquire the reputation of an intellectual enamored of his own mental constructions, or "bachelor machines."

Stories Between 1944 and 1967, Bioy published eight volumes of stories—including Prodigious Story (1956), from which he selected and revised, in 1972, two volumes of stories: Love Stories and Fantastic Stories. The love stories are ironic fables about human follies. The fantastic stories present futuristic machines or supernatural events. In "The Great Seraphim," for example (later included in the book of that name), a Neptune-like creature emerges from the sea at a beach resort. But parody transcends both categories, as it does Bioy's manipulation of detective and science fiction genres. Bioy's stories, like his novels, are really fantastic comedies, as Peruvian critic Jose Miguel Oviedo aptly calls them, in which the void produces laughter (the other side of terror) and in which Bioy's men are often like reckless or fearful children, at the mercy of beloved women who are often abominable monsters. D. P. Gallagher, in a survey of the author's work for the Bulletin of Hispanic Studies in 1975, states, "Bioy Casares's novels and short stories are comic masterpieces whose fundamental joke is the gap that separates what his characters know from what is going on."

Responses to Literature

- 1. How do you think Bioy's collaboration with Jorge Luis Borges strengthened his writing?
- 2. For an introduction to the rise of Argentinian dictator Juan Perón, read Tomas Eloy Martinez's fact-based "novel" about Perón's life: *The Perón Novel* (1988).
- 3. Describe the role of women in *The Invention of Morel*. What would you say in response to someone who claims Bioy is sexist?

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■ Alexandre Biyidi

See Mongo Beti

■ Eric Blair

See George Orwell

William Blake

BORN: 1757, London, England DIED: 1827, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: *Poetry* MAJOR WORKS:

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1793) Songs of Innocence and of Experience (1794)

songs of Innocence and of Experience (1/94)

The First Book of Urizen (1794)

The Book of Los (1795)

Jerusalem: The Emancipation of the Giant

Albion (1804)



William Blake Blake, William, painting by John Linnell. Source unknown.

Overview

William Blake was an English poet, engraver, and painter. An imaginative rebel in both his thought and his art, he combined poetic and pictorial genius to explore important issues in politics, religion, and psychology. Considered insane and mostly discounted by his contemporaries, Blake's reputation as a visionary artist grew after his death.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Early Interest in Art William Blake was born in London on November 28, 1757, the second of five children born to James Blake and his wife, Catherine. His father was a hosier, selling stockings, gloves, and haberdashery (men's clothing). At age ten, Blake started to attend drawing school; at fourteen he began a seven-year apprenticeship with an engraver, and it was as an engraver that Blake was to earn his living for the rest of his life. After he was twenty-one, he studied for a time at the Royal Academy of Arts, where he formed a violent distaste for the academic rules of excellence in art. In August 1782 Blake married Catherine Boucher, who had fallen in love with him at first sight. He taught her to read and write, and she later became a valued assistant.

Fusion of Art and Poetry with New Printing Process From his early teens on, Blake wrote poems,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Blake's famous contemporaries include:

Edward Jenner (1749–1823): British physician who developed a smallpox vaccine.

Marie Antoinette (1755–1793): Queen of France during the French Revolution.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791): Austrian composer and musician.

Horatio Nelson (1758–1805): Preeminent British naval commander during the Napoleonic wars.

Robert Burns (1759–1796): Scottish poet.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850): British poet famous for his Romantic style.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Popular British writer known for such classics as *Ivanhoe*.

often setting them to melodies of his own composition. When he was twenty-six, a collection entitled *Poetical Sketches* was printed with the help of the Reverend and Mrs. Mathew, who held a cultural salon and were patrons of Blake. This volume was the only one of Blake's poetic works to appear in conventional printed form. He later invented and practiced a new method.

After his father died in 1784, Blake set up a print shop with a partner next door to the family hosiery shop. In 1787, his beloved younger brother and pupil, Robert, died. Thereafter William claimed that Robert communicated with him in visions and guided him. It was Robert, William said, who inspired him with the new method of illuminated etching that was to be the vehicle for his poems. The words, design, or some combination of the two was drawn in reverse on a plate covered with an acid-resisting substance; a corrosive was then applied. From these etched plates, pages were printed and later hand-colored. Blake used his unique methods to print almost all his long poems.

In 1787, Blake moved to Poland Street, where he produced *Songs of Innocence* (1789) as the first major work in his new process. This book was later complemented by *Songs of Experience* (1794). The magnificent lyrics in these two collections systematically contrast the unguarded openness of innocence with the cynicism of experience. They are a milestone in the history of the arts, not only because they exhibit originality and high quality but because they are a rare instance of the successful fusion of two art forms by one man.

Age of Revolution Sparks Blake's Imagination After a brief period of admiration for the religious thinker Emanuel Swedenborg, Blake produced a disillusioned reaction titled *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–

1793). In this satire, the "devils" are identified with energy and creative genius, and the "angels" with repression of desire and the oppressive aspects of order and rationality.

Blake had become a political radical and sympathized with the American Revolution and with the French Revolution during its early years. At Poland Street and shortly after his move to Lambeth in 1793, Blake composed and etched short "prophetic" books concerning these events, religious and political repression in general, and the more basic repression of the individual psyche, which he came to see as the root of institutional tyranny. Among these works, all composed between 1793 and 1795, are America, Europe, The Book of Urizen, The Book of Los, The Song of Los, and The Book of Ahania. In these poems, Blake began to work out the powerful mythology he refined in his later and longer "prophecies." He presented this mythology in his first epic-length poem, The Four Zoas (c. 1795–1803), which was never published.

Felpham Period Blake spent the years 1800–1803 working in Felpham, Sussex, with William Hayley, a minor poet and man of letters. Hayley tried to push Blake toward more profitable undertakings, such as painting ladies's fans, but Blake rebelled and returned to London. One result of this conflict was Blake's long poem Milton (c. 1800–1810). In this work, the spiritual issues involved in his quarrel with Hayley are allegorized. Blake's larger themes are dramatized through an account of the decision of the poet Milton to renounce the safety of heaven and return to earth to rectify the errors of the Puritan heritage he had fostered.

Later Years Blake continued to produce some significant work, including his designs for Milton's poems Allegro and Il Penseroso, (1816), and the writing of his own poem The Everlasting Gospel, (c. 1818), but his work found no audience. After 1818, however, conditions improved. He became acquainted with a group of young artists who respected him and appreciated his work. His last six years were spent at Fountain Court, where Blake did some of his best pictorial work: the illustrations to the Book of Job and his unfinished Dante. In 1824, his health began to weaken and he died on August 12, 1827.

Works in Literary Context

William Blake was an English writer, poet, and illustrator of the Romantic period. Romantic authors and artists tended to emphasize the content of their works over the form, stressing imagination and emotion and celebrating nature and freedom.

Picture Books Blake did not write or draw specifically for children, but he believed that children could read and understand his works. He was opposed to the kind of moralistic writing for children that was done by the

clergyman Isaac Watts, whose *Divine and Moral Songs for Children*, published in 1715, taught readers to be hardworking and avoid idleness and mischief. Blake believed that children—and adults, for that matter—should be allowed the freedom to dream and imagine. His first biographer, Alexander Gilchrist, said in his *Life of William Blake: Pictor Ignotus* that Blake "neither wrote nor drew for the many, hardly for the workday men at all, rather for children and angels." He called Blake "a divine child," whose playthings were sun, moon, and stars, the heavens and the earth." Children are also the subjects of many of his works. Since Blake also did the illustrations for his writings, some authorities consider his works to be forerunners of the picture-book form.

Revolutionary Politics The storming of the Bastille in Paris in 1789 and the agonies of the French Revolution sent shock waves through England. Some hoped for a corresponding outbreak of liberty in England while others feared a breakdown of the social order. In much of his writing Blake argues against the monarchy. In his early Tiriel (c. 1789), Blake traces the fall of a tyrannical king. Blake also consistently portrays civilization as chaotic, a direct reflection of the tumultuous times in which he lived.

Politics was surely often the topic of conversation at the publisher Joseph Johnson's house, where Blake was often invited. There Blake met important literary and political figures such as William Godwin, Joseph Priestly, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Paine. According to one legend, Blake is even said to have saved Paine's life by warning him of his impending arrest. Whether or not that is true, it is clear that Blake was familiar with some of the leading radical thinkers of his day.

Another product of the radical 1790s is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Written and etched between 1790 and 1793, Blake's poem brutally satirizes oppressive authority in church and state. The poem also satirizes the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish philosopher whose ideas once attracted Blake's interests.

Blake's work influenced a diverse assortment of later writers and artists, including Irish poet William Butler Yeats, American poet Allen Ginsberg, children's book author and artist Maurice Sendak, and songwriter Bob Dylan.

Works in Critical Context

Blake once defended his art by remarking, "What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care." Blake's passion for originality and imagination informs his creation of a private cosmology that embraces both his lyric and prophetic poetry. In his lifetime, the public knew Blake primarily as an artist and engraver. Perhaps as a result of his unusual method of "publication," Blake's poetry did not receive wide public recognition during his lifetime, but it was read by such famous contemporaries as William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge and other prominent literary figures of the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Blake was best known for exploring the role and value of imagination in humanity's search for truth. Here are some other works that have similar themes:

Lyrical Ballads (1798), by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Lyrical Ballads sought to emphasize personal experience and imagination over abstract language and themes.

A Vision (1937), by William Butler Yeats. Yeats was greatly influenced by Blake and worked to create his own symbolic mythology in this dense and complex treatise. Howl (1956), by Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg's seminal work of the Beat Generation lauded the misfits and rebels whose minds, he claimed, were "destroyed by madness" brought on by the constraints of 1950s American social life. Ginsberg was influenced deeply by Blake, even claiming to have had a vision in which Blake's voice helped him understand the interconnectedness of the universe.

time. For a long time, however, Blake's reputation floundered.

Blake's Critical Recovery The publication in 1863 of Alexander Gilchrist's Life of William Blake: Pictor Ignotus helped save Blake's works from obscurity and established Blake as a major literary figure. Gilchrist's biography motivated other studies of Blake, including Swinburne's 1868 study of Blake's prophecies.

In the early twentieth century, John Sampson's 1905 edition of *The Poetical Works*, provided a solid text for serious study of Blake as did A.G.B. Russell's 1912 catalogue *The Engravings of William Blake*, which reproduced many engravings. Joseph Wicksteed's 1910 study, *Blake's Vision of the Book of Job*, provided a close analysis of Blake's designs and helped to demonstrate that Blake's art should be interpreted in careful detail.

Modern Blake Scholarship Modern scholarship is in large part based on the herculean efforts of Geoffrey Keynes, whose 1921 A Bibliography of William Blake (along with his 1953 Census of William Blake Illuminated Books) set a firm foundation for a critical examination of Blake's works. Keynes's 1925 edition of the Writings of William Blake (and subsequent revisions) became the standard text for decades.

In 1947, Northrop Frye's seminal work *Fearful Symmetry*, opened the field of Blake scholarship by showing the mythic structure of the major works and making the claim for Blake as a major poet of English literature. David Erdman's *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (first

published in 1954, revised 1969), is important in showing Blake as a commentator and critic of the age in which he lived. Among the numerous explications of Blake's poetry that followed, Harold Bloom's *The Visionary Company* (first published in 1961, revised 1971), and Blake's *Apocalypse* (published in 1963), influenced many critics in the reading of individual poems.

Today, Blake scholarship continues at a rapid pace with many critics concentrating on the relationship between text and design in Blake's major poetry. From the relative obscurity of his reputation in his own time, Blake is now recognized as one of the major poets of the Romantic period and one of the most original and challenging figures in the history of English literature.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Choose any of the aphorisms presented in *The Mar-riage of Heaven and Hell* and examine how it may be relevant to today's world.
- 2. Blake meant for the poems of *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* be read together. Choose any of the companion poems (such as "The Chimney Sweeper" or "The Lamb" and "The Tyger") and discuss how each poem presents a different aspect of the same concept.
- 3. Explore the relationship between any of the illustrations accompanying the "illuminated" poems and the text itself. Be sure to use specific references to imagery used in both the illustrations and the text.
- 4. Explore how Blake influenced writers like William Butler Yeats and Allen Ginsberg, Provide specific examples.
- 5. Blake's books *America: A Prophecy* and *Europe: A Prophecy* deal with the idea of revolution in highly allegorical ways. Is this an effective way of addressing political situations? Support your response with specific references to the poems.

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■ Karen Blixen

See Isak Dinesan

M Giovanni Boccaccio

BORN: *1313*, *Italy* DIED: *1375*, *Italy*

NATIONALITY: Italian
GENRE: Poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS: Filostrato (c. 1335)

The Decameron (1349–1351)

Life of Dante (1373)

Overview

The Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio is best known for *The Decameron*. For his Latin works and his role in reviving Hellenistic learning in Florence, he is often considered one of the early humanists. Though Boccaccio is rooted in the Middle Ages, his conception of life hints at the Renaissance; like his fellow poet Petrarch, he straddled two periods. He strove to raise Italian prose to an art form nurtured in both medieval rhetoric and classical Latin prose and had immense admiration for Petrarch as well as for another of his Italian contemporaries, Dante Alighieri.



Giovanni Boccaccio Boccaccio, Giovanni, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Desire to Compose Giovanni Boccaccio was the son of a merchant from Certaldo, identified as Boccaccio di Chellino. The exact date and place of Boccaccio's illegitimate birth are unknown. Despite tales of his birth in Paris, it seems that he was born in 1313 in Certaldo or, more likely, in Florence, where he spent his childhood. Of these years he wrote, "I remember that, before having completed my seventh year, a desire was born in me to compose verse."

Banking, a Muse, and Education in the Royal Court His father claimed him as legitimate about 1320 and gave him a decent education, sending him to the school of a famous educator, Mazzuoli da Strada, whose son Zanobi remained a lifelong friend and correspondent of Boccaccio. In 1327, Boccaccio's father was sent to Naples to head the branch of the Bardi banking company there. He took his son with him, clearly planning for him a life in commerce. The king of Naples, Robert of Anjou, was eager to establish lines of credit with the major Florentine banking houses. Under the Angevins, a French dynasty also named the House of Plantagenet, Naples became a commercial hub and, since King Robert had a taste for culture, a major center of learning. Boccaccio's formative years were

spent in this vibrant southern capital. While learning the business of banking (for which he had little inclination), he was drawn to the dynamic life of the port and the tales of merchants who arrived from all corners of the Mediterranean.

Through the royal court and library, he came into contact with some of the most distinguished intellectuals of his day. Naples was also a city of beautiful women, who both stimulated the young man's senses and inspired his first literary efforts: romances in prose and verse that resembled the tradition of French love poetry. Like Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura, Boccaccio's "Fiammetta" served as a muse, inspiring the works of the first half of his career. She has frequently been identified as Maria of Aquino, the illegitimate daughter of King Robert. Yet, like the notion of Boccaccio's Parisian birth, this idea must be classified as myth, in part encouraged by Boccaccio himself, who sought to romanticize his life into a story overshadowed by the cloud of illegitimacy.

Before leaving Naples, Boccaccio had composed *Diana's Hunt* (c. 1334) and the lengthy *Filostrato* (c. 1335), a version of the tale of Troilus and Cressida in octave form. His *Filostrato* and *The Book of Theseus* (1340–1341) that followed are of particular interest, since they are, respectively, the sources of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (1382) and "The Knight's Tale" from *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400).

Back to Florence When Boccaccio returned to Florence at the end of 1340, he found a city in crisis. An upheaval in the banking world had brought many major Florentine companies close to bankruptcy. Boccaccio's father, having weathered severe financial setbacks, had returned to the city in 1338 and was married to a woman for whom the son expressed little sympathy. Naples must have seemed far away, and Florence a dreary alternative. During the next decade, however, Boccaccio established himself as the leading storyteller of his generation.

Around this time, Boccaccio began thinking about his masterpiece, The Decameron. This collection of one hundred stories established Boccaccio as one of the founders of European narrative and served as a sourcebook for future storytellers (including Chaucer and Shakespeare). The Decameron weaves the idealized loves of the medieval tradition into the lives of merchants and adventurers. Set against the backgrounds of cities such as Florence, Naples, and Milan, the stories emphasize intelligence and individual initiative. The great pestilence of 1348 may have afforded Boccaccio the occasion to write his masterpiece; it provides the framework for this collection of one hundred stories. The book grew out of a period of despair for Boccaccio, as the plague killed his father and stepmother and made him the head of the family. The Decameron reflects Boccaccio's desire for the restoration of order out of chaos.

Petrarch and Politics Crucial to Boccaccio's spiritual and artistic development in these years was his friendship with Petrarch, whom he had admired from a distance but

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Boccaccio's famous contemporaries include:

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321): Boccaccio wrote the first biography of this famous Italian poet known for *The Divine Comedy*.

Petrarch (1304–1374): This close friend of Boccaccio was known for his poetry and gave his name to a sonnet form

Pope Urban V (1310–1370): Pope from 1362 to 1370, Urban was a supporter of education and of the restoration of the papacy to Italy.

Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–c.1400): This English writer's Canterbury Tales is very similar to *The Decameron*.

finally met in Florence in September of 1350. In the spring of 1351, Boccaccio led a delegation to Padua, where Petrarch was residing, bringing with him the official restoration of citizenship to the poet (Petrarch's father had been exiled, along with Dante, in the political crisis of 1300). Boccaccio also offered Petrarch a professorship at the newly established University of Florence—which he declined. In a garden in the shadow of the city cathedral, these two masters of Italian letters spent weeks in intimate conversation (faithfully transcribed by Boccaccio) on questions of poetry, politics, and morals. When Boccaccio experienced a religious crisis in 1362, Petrarch persuaded his dear friend not to abandon the vocation of literature and not to burn the manuscript of *The Decameron*.

During these years, Boccaccio was also at the service of the republic when needed and was actively engaged in diplomatic activities. He twice led delegations to the papal court at Avignon (in 1354 and 1365). The intention was to assure the pope that Florence was devoted to the papacy, as well as to encourage Pope Urban V to restore the pontificate to Rome. In spite of his age and the increasing dangers from bandits, both journeys were diplomatically successful.

By early 1361, Boccaccio had retired to Certaldo, which thereafter remained his home and refuge. In this final chapter of his life, three themes persisted: fidelity to relatives and friends (notably Petrarch), prompt service to the republic, and tireless devotion to literature. News of Petrarch's death reached him late in 1374. On December 21, 1375, Boccaccio himself died and was buried in Certaldo in the Church of Saints Michael and James.

Works in Literary Context

Italian Prose Boccaccio wrote in Italian at a time when Latin was considered the proper language of literature. He wrote prose when poetry was considered the domain of

artists. He paved the way for generations of future novelists who sought to capture real speech in their works. The prose of *The Decameron*, in its balanced, rhythmic cadences, became the model of Italian literary prose.

Humanism The Decameron tales have an abundance of subjects. In his multitude of characters, from ridiculous fools to noble and resolute figures, from all times and social conditions, Boccaccio depicts a fair version of human nature. He emphasizes intelligence and a kind of worldly prudence with which characters overcome difficult situations, noble or ignoble. Boccaccio presents life from an earthly point of view, with a complete absence of moralizing intentions. While Petrarch's humanism is considered classic, Boccaccio's approach is considered vernacular, or common, yet Petrarch's traditional influence eventually changed Boccaccio's style.

Works in Critical Context

Women in The Decameron The essential feature of The Decameron is realism; the world of the tales is the world of here and now. The demographic range is wide: it includes not only lords and princes but merchants, bankers, doctors, scholars, peasants, priests, and monks-and a surprising number of women. A token of the feminist thrust of the work may be seen in the fact that seven of the ten narrators are women. Additionally, Boccaccio prefaces The Decameron with a dedication to women. Scholar Ray Fleming, in his study of "Day Five" of *The Decameron*, looks at what he sees as Boccaccio's "happy endings" through a feminist lens and shows that these endings are only perceived as happy due to "masculine priorities and values." In contrast, Pamela Joseph Benson invites a reading of female agency: "A persuasive and sensitive profeminist voice emerges from the text, a voice that admires female political, moral and physical strength although it does not endorse a change in the contemporary political status of women." Janet Levarie Smarr summarizes: "The issue of Boccaccio's attitudes towards women has evoked considerable debate, especially in the last decade [1990s]. Arguments are easily found for both cases: that Boccaccio was a feminist ahead of his time, and that he shared the traditional or even misogynistic views of his era."

Poetic Force in The Decameron Barbara Zaczek suggests that "by imbuing a word with the power to change, even invert, a given situation, Boccaccio draws the readers' attention to the role of language in society, demonstrating how verbal interaction assumes social significance." Gregory Stone also notes Boccaccio's intersection between language, meaning, and importance: "Boccaccio conceives poetry as the force that originates, determines, or triggers physis. Poetry, in other words, is regarded not as the imitation of nature but rather as natura herself, as the birth, blossoming, or arising of a previously concealed human ethos. Poetry, for Boccaccio, is the event of historical alteration of human nature."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Read Boccaccio's *Book of Theseus* and Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale". Make a chart comparing and contrasting them. Consider plot points, characterization, settings, language, and tone.
- 2. With a classmate, research humanism on the Internet or at your library, then find examples of it in today's pop culture. Create an audiovisual presentation for the class based on your findings.
- 3. Read a selection of Shakespeare's sonnets. With a classmate, brainstorm ways in which the sonnets are similar to selections from Boccaccio that you have read in class.
- 4. Love, fortune, and pity are recurring themes in *The Decameron*. With a classmate, find two passages in the selections of *The Decameron* that you have read that deal with love, fortune, and/or pity. Together with your classmate, write an informal paper describing Boccaccio's concept of love, fortune, and/or pity. Use examples from the text to support your opinions.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Boccaccio is said to be one of the Western world's first important humanists. Humanists during Renaissance times were concerned not with the supernatural but with morality and decency for all human beings, despite class, religion, or education. Here are some other works that affirm humanity's basic rational qualities.

- History of the Peloponnesian War (c. 411 BCE), a history by Thucydides. This account of the famous war is special because it is relatively neutral, based on hard evidence, and does not focus on gods.
- Canzoniere (1327–1368), poetry by Petrarch. Though these descriptions of the poet's love for Laura are often lofty, they express very honest human emotions.
- Utopia (1516), a book by Thomas More. In More's idealized world, almost everything is tolerated, particularly most religions.

Ed. Thomas C. Stillinger and F. Regina Psaki. Vol. 8. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Annali d'Italianistica, 2006.

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María Luisa Bombal

BORN: 1910, Chile
DIED: 1980, Chile
NATIONALITY: Chilean
GENRE: Novels, short stories

MAJOR WORKS:

The House of Mist (1935)
The Shrouded Woman (1938)

New Islands, and Other Stories (1982)



María Luisa Bombal Coleccion del Archivo del Escritor Biblioteca Nacional de Chile

Overview

Although she produced only a small body of work during her lifetime and was relatively unknown in English-speaking countries until after her death, María Luisa Bombal is credited with changing the style, tone, and substance of Hispanic literature. Her avant-garde works—considered early examples of feminist writing—deviated from the exaggeratedly masculine trends that dominated South American fiction. Composed in reaction to the confines of her society, Bombal's writing centers on women who escape their lonely, boring, and unfulfilled existences through fantasy.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Living the Boom María Luisa Bombal was born in Viña del Mar, Chile, on June 8, 1910. Her father was an Argentine of French origin, and her mother was of German descent. In 1923, after the death of her father, Bombal journeyed to Paris with her mother and two sisters and spent her adolescent years there. She adopted French as her own tongue and wrote her first literary pieces in that language.

Bombal graduated from the University of the Sorbonne in Paris with a thesis on the nineteenth-century French writer Mérimée. She also studied dramatic art and participated in several theatrical groups, both in France and in Chile. During these formative years spent in Paris, the literary and artistic movement of surrealism was in fashion, and a strong surrealist tendency can be seen in her novels and short stories.

In 1931, Bombal returned to her native Chile but soon left in 1933 to live in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where she became a member of the thriving literary group often nicknamed "The Boom," which included Jorge Luis Borges and Victoria Ocampo, publisher of the famous magazine Sur. Bombal worked for the journal, which published her two novels and short stories. At that time she shared an apartment with poet Pablo Neruda and his wife, composing her first fiction at their kitchen table. At the time, Neruda, the Chilean poet who became a Nobel Prize winner, was the Chilean consul in the Argentine capital. Inspired by him, Bombal finished her first novella, The Final Mist, which met with critical acclaim in 1935. In 1938, her novella The Shrouded Woman appeared. That same year she married an Argentine painter, but the marriage broke up two years later.

To America In 1941, Bombal took a brief trip to the United States where she met such important writers as William Faulkner and Sherwood Anderson. Back in Buenos Aires, she published her stories "The Tree" and "The New Islands." Later that same year, Bombal moved back to Chile, where she shot and seriously wounded Eulogio Sanchez Errazuriz, her anti-Communist lover. She was

jailed and, upon Errazuriz's recovery, banished from Chile. Bombal then immigrated to the United States. Unlike many other Latin American authors of the time, including Borges and Neruda, Bombal avoided much of the political turmoil in Argentina and Chile due to her move to the United States. In 1946, the military-led government of Argentina came under the control of Juan Perón, a leader beloved by many lower-class Argentineans but viewed as an anti-intellectual dictator by those skeptical of his policies. This Latin American turmoil continued throughout Bombal's life, with military dictator Augusto Pinochet taking control of the Chilean government in 1973 and remaining in power until 1990 despite many charges of human-rights abuses against him.

During the thirty-year span Bombal lived in New York, the only works she published were English translations she wrote herself of her books *The Final Mist* (revised and published as *The House of Mist* in 1947) and *The Shrouded Woman*. She added so much additional explanatory material to the original of *The Final Mist* that it unfortunately lost much of its power and fascination. Finally, in ill health, Bombal returned to spend her last few years in Chile, where she died in Santiago on May 6, 1980. During most of her life, Bombal did not achieve significant fame, although in her last years the Chilean government granted her a stipend. With the keen interest in the feminist movement in later years, her works were read and commented on more widely.

Works in Literary Context

Bombal was one of the first Latin American novelists to break away from the realist tradition in fiction and to write in a highly individual and personal style, stressing irrational and subconscious themes. During the 1930s when most of her fellow writers were turning out works emphasizing social conflict, Bombal turned inward for her inspiration and produced several works of remarkable artistic quality. She incorporated the secret inner world of her women protagonists into the mainstream of her novels. She accomplished this in a prose charged with poetic vibration and filled with a sense of imminent tragedy, a melancholy atmosphere in which the factors of time and death play somber roles.

The Universal Woman As she writes and rewrites her material, Bombal draws on an apparently finite number of characters, situations, and motifs. When considered as a whole, her work may be perceived as a set of variations on one specific theme. The greater part of her writing is comprised of the life, development, crises, and sufferings of women; it is almost as if each successive piece of writing offers a new facet of the same woman. Almost without exception, they experience tremendous difficulties in carrying out their traditional role as dependent female, or wife, the only truly acceptable role that society seems to envisage for them. We are reminded of one of Bombal's most poignant lines, voiced by Ana

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bombal's famous contemporaries include:

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989): This Spanish painter was responsible for much of the surrealist movement in Europe and abroad.

Eudora Welty (1909–2001): American author noted for her fiction about the American South.

Augusto Pinochet (1915–2006): Controversial president of Chile from 1974 to 1990, known for his human rights abuses and also for his bringing order and economic stability to Chile.

Gunter Grass (1927–): A 1999 Nobel Prize winner, Grass is a German writer whose first novel, *The Tin Drum* (1959) leads readers through the events of the World War II and postwar years through a distorted and exaggerated perspective.

María in *The Shrouded Woman*: "Why, why must a woman's nature be such that a man has always to be the pivot of her life?"

Escape Women in Bombal's stories seem to be embarked on a permanent, and often fruitless, quest for love and companionship. These troubled, alienated women are driven to seek refuge in a universe of dreams or fairy tales that eventually becomes more real, more immediate, and infinitely more tolerable than their objective, physical world. Fantasy mingles with reality, until neither the protagonist nor the reader is sure which is which. Equally at ease with a first-person or third-person narrative, Bombal's prose is intensely poetic and musical. In fact, music plays an important part throughout her writing (though nowhere as clearly as in "The Tree"). Her narrative concentrates on one essential theme that she explores with sensitivity and honesty, the limitations imposed on women—as much by women themselves as by the men who control their lives.

Works in Critical Context

Bombal offers many interpretative challenges to her readers and critics, not least because she is one of the few authors who has rewritten their own novels in another language. Critics largely agree that Bombal's literary output, though not great in quantity, is of the highest quality. Bombal is commonly credited with having introduced a new, feminist sensibility to Chilean literature. There are Chilean elements in her works, but her depiction of characters and their conflicts transcends the local and national, becoming a universal comment on the situation of humanity, not a set of observations rooted in any particular society or age.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Bombal was very concerned about women's rights and how women make their way and find their identity in patriarchal societies. Here are a few other works that explore this theme.

As I Lay Dying (1930), by William Faulkner. This disastrous and darkly comic tale chronicles the death of Addie Bundren and the subsequent journey to bury her corpse in her family's cemetery several miles away.

To the Lighthouse (1927), by Virginia Woolf. This observational novel shows the limitations of purely masculine and purely feminine qualities and presents a vision of uniting the two through art.

Play It as It Lays (1970), by Joan Didion. Protagonist Maria Wyeth is a failed actress trying to scrape her life back together in the California desert.

Thelma and Louise (1991), directed by Ridley Scott. Two women desperately try to outrun the law after a violent incident in a parking lot.

The Final Mist Bombal's first novella, The Final Mist, was published in Spanish in 1935; twelve years later, it was revised, enlarged, and published in English as The House of Mist. Set in South America, the tale revolves around Helga, a woman who resorts to a dream life for satisfaction after realizing that her new husband, Daniel, remains devoted to his dead wife. The novella is named for the white mist that rolls up from the lagoon where Daniel's first wife drowned. American critics found the tale somewhat oversentimentalized but nonetheless intriguing. In a review for the New York Times Richard Sullivan noted, "Bombal's heroine dwells far too steadily on her raptures," but he judged The House of Mist to be "dexterous, amoral, delicate."

New Islands, and Other Stories Bombal's Englishspeaking audience expanded after her death with the release of New Islands, and Other Stories in 1982. The entire collection is inundated with the author's preoccupation with the powers of the imagination. One story, "The Unknown," is about a pirate ship lost in a whirlpool at the bottom of the sea. One of her most popular stories, "The Tree," chronicles a woman's growing alienation from her husband. As observed by Ronald De Feo in the New York Times Book Review, the closing lines capture Bombal's basic philosophy: "It may be that true happiness lies in the conviction that one has irremediably lost happiness. It is only then that we can begin to live without hope or fear, able finally to enjoy all the small pleasures, which are the most lasting." New Islands was well received in the United States. Reviewers were particularly impressed by Bombal's ability to elicit empathy in her readers.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Examine the male characters in a few of Bombal's works. Can you fault them entirely for the suppression of the female characters? Why or why not?
- 2. Compare and contrast one of Bombal's short stories with one of Pablo Neruda's poems. What similarities do you find that might help you understand Chilean literature and culture?
- 3. Much of Bombal's work examines how women react to the social and emotional constraints of their lives. Many women writers of past generations have treated this theme, including Kate Chopin (*The Awakening*, 1899) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman ("The Yellow Wallpaper," 1892). Do you think women today feel the same kinds of constraints experienced by Bombal's protagonists? Or have times changed sufficiently so that women are now "free" from old limitations?

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W Yves Bonnefoy

BORN: 1923, Tours, France NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Poetry, translation, literary criticism

MAIOR WORKS:

Du mouvement et de l'immobilite de Douve (On the Motion and Immobility of Douve, 1953)

Hier regnant desert (In Yesterday's Desert Realm, 1958)

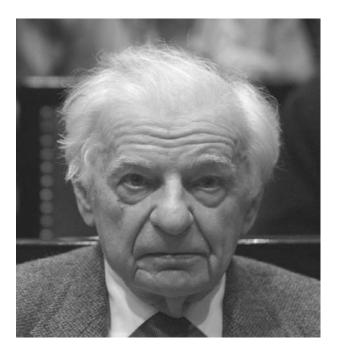
Anti-Platon (Against Plato, 1962)

Pierre écrite (Words in Stone, 1965)

Dans le leurre du seuil (Lure of the Threshold, 1975)

Overview

Poet, translator, and respected critic of both literature and art, Yves Bonnefoy is widely acknowledged as the most



Yves Bonnefoy Michal Cizek / AFP / Getty Images

significant and influential figure in contemporary French poetry. Critics note in Bonnefoy's work affinities with both the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century and the surrealists of the twentieth century. He is admired for his investigation of spiritual and philosophical matters and his preference for exploring the subconscious rather than material reality and conscious perceptions.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Landscape and Loss Yves Bonnefoy was born in Tours, France, on June 24, 1923, the son of Marius Elie Bonnefoy, a railroad worker, and Hélène Maury Bonnefoy, a teacher. Bonnefoy spent his childhood summers at his grandfather's house in Toirac, near the Lot River. This summer landscape, he is quoted as saying in the preface to New and Selected Poems: Yves Bonnefoy (1995), "formed me in my deepest choices, with its vast, deserted plateaus and gray stone," providing images and themes that his poetry has probed ever more deeply over the years. His early life was also profoundly influenced by the loss of his father, who died when Bonnefoy was thirteen. Bonnefoy reacted to this loss by immersing himself in his studies. A more lasting and more poetically resonant impact of his father's loss may be found in the sense of desolation that pervades his early work, relieved, however, by moments of clarity and illumination redolent of his idyllic childhood summers.

Literary Success In 1944 Bonnefoy arrived in Paris—which was occupied by Nazi German troops at the time—to study mathematics and philosophy at the Sor-

bonne. He began to write poetry under the influence of such surrealists as André Breton and Victor Brauner. His study of the German philosopher George Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel is also evident throughout his work. Hegel's theory operates both thematically and structurally in Bonnefoy's poetry, allying his work with surrealism.

With the encouragement of Jean Wahl, Bonnefoy put aside his philosophy thesis and worked for three years at the National Center for Scientific Research, studying English literary creativity, reading literary theorists, and writing his own poetry. His first major collection, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve* (1968), was published in 1953 to immediate acclaim and established his reputation. The collection of short poems centers around a mysterious female, Douve. She variously represents earth, woman, love, and poetry. The progress of the poem portrays changing moods and metaphysical transformations and sets up dialectics such as mind/spirit, hope/despair, and life/death.

The publication of *In the Shadow's Light, and Early Poems*, 1947–1959 reinforced Bonnefoy's reputation as a great postwar poet, one dedicated to crafting verses that embrace and envelop human feelings and emotions. In 1966 Bonnefoy cofounded a journal of art and literature, *L'Ephéme*, with Gaëtan Picon, André du Bouchet, and others; he coedited the review until it ceased publication in 1972. Since the 1970s, Bonnefoy has taught literature at several universities. He wrote many philosophical essays on the nature of writing and continued to published poetry, including the lauded 1975 collection *Dans le leurre du seuil* (*Lure of the Threshold*).

In the 1980s and 1990s, Bonnefoy turned his attention to translating the poetry of such writers as John Donne, John Keats, and William Butler Yeats. At present, Bonnefoy continues to write essays and translate Shakespeare's plays into French.

Works in Literary Context

The Unity of Things Much of Bonnefoy's poetry is preoccupied with loss and death, and the transience of all earthly things is emphasized as a paradoxical compensation for the loss of hope for immortality. Some critics view his work as a quest for what Bonnefoy himself terms "le vrai lieu" (the true place), a location in time or space, or a state of mind wherein the fundamental unity of all things is perceived. Bonnefoy's insistence on the importance of accepting the presence of death in everyday life has prompted many commentators to regard him as the first existentialist poet. Jean Starobinski commented: "The work of Bonnefoy offers us today one of the most committed and deeply pondered examples of [the] modern vocation of poetry. His writings as poet and essayist, in which the personal accent is so clear, and in which the I of subjective assertion is manifested with force and simplicity, have for [their] object a relation to the world, not

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bonnefoy's famous contemporaries include:

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986): French author and theorist, most recognized for her metaphysical novels, she laid significant groundwork for contemporary feminist thought in her 1949 analysis of women's oppression, *The Second Sex*.

James Dewey Watson (1928–): A molecular biologist and codiscoverer of the structure of DNA.

Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980): Movie director known for his thriller and suspense films.

Madeleine Albright (1937–): The first female United States Secretary of State.

Anne Frank (1929–1945): A young Dutch writer who penned her famous *Diary of a Young Girl* while she hid from the Nazis in Amsterdam.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): Author, philosopher, and critic, this Frenchman is renowned for his philosophical principles of existentialism.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Foremost to Bonnefoy's themes is the presence of death in everyday life, leading some to label him "the first existentialist poet." Other works that explore humankind's preoccupation with death and the possibility of immortality include:

Fear and Trembling (1843), a book by Søren Kierkegaard. In his interpretation of the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac, Binding of Isaac, Kierkegaard explores the conflicts between theology and philosophy, ethics and morality.

Notes from the Underground (1864), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Widely considered to be the first existentialist novel, this work influenced numerous writers, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Joseph Heller, and Ralph Ellison.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883–1985), a philosophical treatise by Friedrich Nietzsche. Among the many themes explored in Nietzsche's best-known work is that of eternal recurrence, the concept that everything that has occurred in history will repeat itself an infinite number of times

Nausea (1938), a novel by Jean-Paul Sartre. Famous as one of the most important existentialist texts, this novel explores thirty-year-old protagonist Antoine Roquentin's struggle with existential angst, unreality, and the hostility of the human condition.

an internal reflection on the self. This ocuvre is one of the least parcissistic there is."

Works in Critical Context

Bonnefoy's first three volumes of verse, On the Motion and Immobility of Douve, In Yesterday's Desert Realm, and Words in Stone, are often considered a poetic cycle. Each volume is composed of short, interrelated poems that expand or resolve themes present in the others.

On the Motion and Immobility of Douve Critics have variously interpreted Douve as the speaker's beloved, a mythological symbol for all women, a river or moat, a forest, the poetic principle, and as the poem itself. Against a surreal and stark landscape in which wind, stone, and fire are discernible elements, Douve repeatedly dies, decomposes, and comes back to life. Michael Bishop remarked: "Death, despite its 'frightful,' 'silly' orchestrations is felt, throughout these intense poems, to be doubly positive. It is the one phenomenon that, for Bonnefoy, flings us back towards our existence, our leaking yet potentially full being-in-the-world."

In Yesterday's Desert Realm and Words in Stone In the collection In Yesterday's Desert Realm, Bonnefoy explores the significance of death and its presence in daily life. Although Bonnefov employed a more optimistic tone and less-violent imagery in this collection, the poems are generally considered more difficult and have garnered the least critical attention of the three volumes in the cycle. In an essay, Marc Hofstadter presented the idea that In Yesterday's Desert Realm is a continuation of the journey begun in On the Motion and Immobility of Douve and the journey is completed in Words in Stone. Hofstadter wrote: "Beginning in despair of the validity of the search or of the self's ability to pursue it ... In Yesterday's Desert Realm takes the poet and us through a journey that ends, after all, in an opening up towards presence. Words in Stone emphasizes presence in the here-and-now and maintains the optimism which concluded In Yesterday's Desert Realm by praising the present moment as not only all there is but all that the speaker desires."

Responses to Literature

- 1. As you read *Lure of the Threshold*, note the imagery Bonnefoy chooses. In a short analysis, note images that are particularly striking and explain how these images relate to the themes Bonnefoy explores.
- 2. Using *Lure of the Threshold* as an example, discuss the role of the past in Bonnefoy's verse.
- 3. Bonnefoy is often considered the first surrealist poet. Others have argued that he is the first existentialist poet. Use several of Bonnefoy's poems to provide examples of these labels.

4. Using specific examples from his first three volumes of poetry—On the Motion and Immobility of Douve, In Yesterday's Desert Realm, and Words in Stone—describe Bonnefoy's views on death.

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Jorge Luis Borges

BORN: 1899, Buenos Aires, Argentina DIED: 1986, Geneva, Switzerland NATIONALITY: Argentinian

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, and criticism

MAJOR WORKS:

Passion for Buenos Aires (1923)

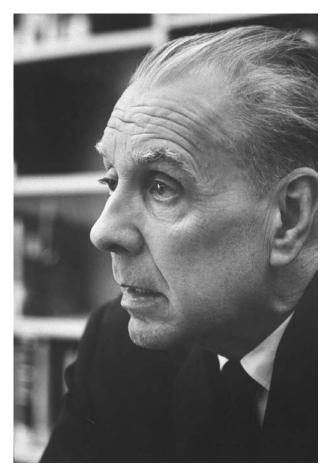
Ficciones (1944) The Aleph (1949)

Other Inquisitions (1952)

Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings (1972)

Overview

Jorge Luis Borges, considered by some as one of the great writers of the twentieth century, was an Argentine writer and poet. Borges was a significant influence on such celebrated Latin American writers as Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Marío Vargas Llosa. He is best known for his short stories, but was also an estab-



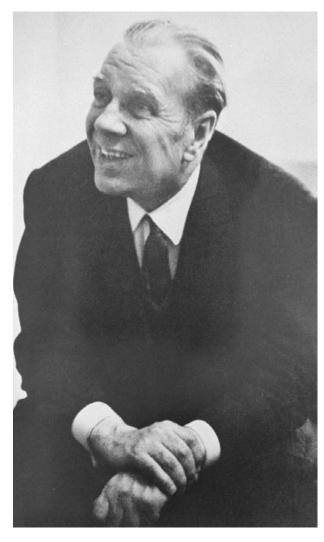
Jorges Luis Borges Charles H. Phillips / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

lished critic and translator. His early works were classified as avant-garde, or innovative and daring compared to mainstream literature; later, his style evolved into what can best be described as "post-avant-garde."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Jorge Luis Borges was born on August 24, 1899, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. A few years later his family moved to the northern suburb of Palermo, which he was to celebrate in prose and verse. He received his earliest education at home, where he learned English and read widely in his father's library of English books. When Borges was nine years of age, he began his public schooling in Palermo, and in the same year, published his first literary undertaking—a translation into Spanish of Oscar Wilde's "The Happy Prince."

European Education and Influence In 1914 the Borges family traveled to Europe. When World War I broke out, they settled for the duration in Switzerland where young Borges finished his formal education at the Collège in Geneva. During World War I, most of Europe was engaged in the conflict by siding with either the



Jorge Luis Borges Borges, Jorge Luis, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Allied powers—headed by Great Britain, France, and Russia—or the Central powers, led by Germany and Austria-Hungary. However, a handful of countries remained neutral throughout the four-year war; these countries included Spain, the Netherlands, and Switzerland—where the Borges family waited out the war. By 1919, when the family moved on to Spain, Borges had learned several languages and had begun to write and translate poetry.

In Seville and Madrid he frequented literary gatherings where he absorbed the lessons of new poetical theorists of the time—especially those of Rafael Cansinos Asséns, who headed a group of writers who came to be known as "Ultraists." When the family returned to Argentina in 1921, Borges rediscovered his native Buenos Aires and began to write poems dealing with his intimate feelings for the city, its past, and certain fading features of its quiet suburbs.

Back to Argentina With other young Argentine writers, Borges collaborated in the founding of new publications in which the Ultraist mode was cultivated in the New World. His first volume of poetry, Passion for Buenos Aires (Fervor de Buenos Aires), was published in 1923, and it also made somewhat of a name for him in Spain.

In 1925 his second book of poetry, *Moon Across the Way (Luna de enfrente)*, appeared, followed in 1929 by *San Martin Copybook (Cuaderno San Martín)*—the last new collection of his verse to appear for three decades. Borges gradually developed a keen interest in literary criticism. His critical and philosophical essays began to fill most of the volumes he published during the period 1925–1940.

A New Style In 1938, with his father gravely ill from a heart ailment, Borges obtained an appointment in a municipal library in Buenos Aires. Before year's end, his father died. Borges himself came close to death from complications of an infected head injury.

This period of crisis produced an important change in Borges. He began to write prose fiction tales of a curious and highly original character. These pieces seemed to be philosophical essays invested with narrative qualities and tensions. Others were short stories infused with metaphorical concepts. Ten of these concise, well-executed stories were collected in *Ficciones* (1944). A second volume of similar tales, entitled *The Aleph* (*El Aleph*), was published in 1949. Borges's fame as a writer firmly rests on the narratives contained in these two books, to which other stories were added in later editions.

Writing Under Perón In 1946, the military-led government of Argentina came under the control of Juan Perón, a leader beloved by many lower-class Argentineans but viewed as an anti-intellectual dictator by those skeptical of his policies. Under Perón's regime, Borges was removed from his position at the Buenos Aires Municipal Library. He boldly spoke out against Perón, and remained in Argentina despite the persecution he faced. In 1955, following the overthrow of the Perónist regime in Argentina, Borges was named director of the National Library in Buenos Aires. In that same year his sight deteriorated to the point where he became almost totally blind.

After *The Aleph*, Borges published an important collection of essays, several collections of poetry and prose sketches, and two collections of new short stories. Aside from these works, Borges wrote over a dozen books in collaboration with other persons. Foremost among his collaborators was Adolfo Bioy Casares, an Argentine novelist and short-story writer, who was Borges's closest literary associate for nearly forty years. A Viking collection of Borges's work began in 1998 with *Borges's Collected Fictions* and followed by *Selected Poems* (1999), a bilingual volume of two hundred poems covering the range of Borges's work.

World Recognition In 1961 Borges shared with Samuel Beckett the ten-thousand-dollar International Publishers Prize, and world recognition at last began to come his way. He received countless honors and prizes. In 1970 he was the first recipient of the twenty-five-thousand-dollar Matarazzo Sobrinho Inter-American Literary Prize.

Borges married Elsa Astete Millan in 1967 but divorced in 1970. He married Maria Kodama in 1986, shortly before his death on June 14 in Geneva, Switzerland.

On March 13, 2000, the National Book Critics Circle honored Borges's memory with the criticism award for his collection *Selected Non-Fictions*. The collection won praise for its sharp criticism and philosophical incisiveness.

Works in Literary Context

In his 1969 study *The Narrow Act: Borges's Art of Allu*sion, Ronald J. Christ offers an important piece of advice to anyone reading Borges for the first time: "The point of origin for most of Borges's fiction is neither character nor plot...but, instead, as in science fiction, a proposition, an idea, a metaphor, which, because of its ingenious or fantastic quality, is perhaps best call[ed] a conceit."

The Labyrinth Borges's signature in literature is the construct known as the labyrinth. The writer's life is transmuted into images that are reanimated in his work. Reid wrote, "The library becomes the infinite library of Babel, containing all the possible books and turning into nightmares." In a 1983 interview with Nicomedes Suárez-Aráuz in the Massachusetts Review, Borges discussed his discovery of the labyrinth as a youth in his father's library. A book he found there included a large engraving of a building with many cracks. With his myopic vision, Borges thought that with a magnifying glass he would find a Minotaur—a fierce creature who inhabited a maze in Greek myth—within the seemingly exitless maze. Of the experience he stated, "That labyrinth was, besides a symbol of bewilderment, a symbol of being lost in life. I believe that all of us at one time or another, have felt that we are lost, and I saw in the labyrinth the symbol of that condition."

The lost labyrinth is a particularly favored form in the author's work, especially in the story "The Garden of the Forking Paths." Borges told Suárez-Aráuz that such a construct was something magical to him. He said that the "lost labyrinth seems to me to be something magical because a labyrinth is a place where one loses oneself, a place (in my story) which in turn is lost in time. The idea of a labyrinth which disappears, of a lost labyrinth, is twice as magical. That story is a tale which I imagined to be multiplied or forked in various directions. In that story the reader is presented with all the events leading to the execution of a crime whose intention the reader does not understand."

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Borges's famous contemporaries include:

Juan Perón (1895–1974): General and politician, president of Argentina from 1946 to 1955 and again from 1973 to his death a year later. A divisive figure, his ardent supporters praised him for his support of the working classes while his opponents considered him little more than a dictator and Nazi sympathizer.

Eva Perón (1919–1952): Wife of Juan Perón and founder of Argentina's first female political party. She seriously considered a run for the vice presidency before being appointed with the official title of Spiritual Leader of the Nation; a year later, she was dead from cancer at the age of thirty-three.

James Joyce (1882–1941): Irish modernist writer and expatriate. By the time his last novel, *Finnegans Wake*, was published in 1939, his influence on Latin American writers was firmly established, leading to the later "boom" of Latin American literature by the likes of Borges and Marguez.

H. G. Wells (1866–1946): British author known primarily for such works of science fiction as *The Time Machine* (1888) and *The War of the Worlds* (1897). Wells was also an outspoken socialist and pacifist. Borges, an admirer of Wells, was influenced by both his literature and his politics.

Postmodernism Continuing the tradition of fantastic literature established by Edgar Allan Poe in the nineteenth century, Borges transformed the genre into an electric whole that allowed him to explore philosophical ideas and to pose relevant questions. After participating in and observing the development of the avant-garde during the first quarter of the century, Borges created his own type of post-avant-garde literature in order to reveal the formal and intellectual density involved in writing. Borges's influence is seen, especially in Latin American literature, in various writers such as Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez, his confessed admirers.

The first half of the twentieth century saw an explosion of literary schools, styles, and attitudes espoused and practiced by Argentine poets, novelists, and short-story writers. By the time Borges wrote *The Aleph*, his country had witnessed the birth and death of several literary movements, all of which surface in the whole of Borges's work.

Works in Critical Context

Borges is universally regarded as a major and powerful figure in twentieth-century literature; indeed, it is as

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Borges's work is often marked by extreme erudition and a concern more with fantastical ideas rather than plot or character. Other such works include:

Foucault's Pendulum (1988) by Umberto Eco. Three friends hatch an occult conspiracy plan that takes on a life of its own in this novel.

The Book of Laughter and Forgetting (1979) by Milan Kundera. Czech writer Kundera explores the idea of "forgetting" in different contexts in this novel.

Murphy (1939), by Samuel Beckett. Beckett, like Borges, experimented with the short story form and adapts many of the latter's techniques in this novel, especially the incorporation of various types of obscure knowledge as an essential element of the story.

difficult to find a negative critique of Borges's work as it is to find an essay on the failures of Shakespeare as a dramatist. Most critics agree with James E. Irby, who boldly states in his preface to the 1962 collection *Labyrinths* that Borges's work is "one of the most extraordinary expressions in all Western literature of modern man's anguish of time, of space, of the infinite."

When Borges's collection of short stories *The Garden of Forking Paths* initially appeared in Argentina in 1941, reviewers were quick to recognize something new. Most critical commentary had concentrated on his poetry, although in 1933 a special issue of the magazine *Mega-fono* devoted to a discussion of him reveals that critics had begun to treat him as a writer of prose as well as poetry.

Although Borges's stories garnered critical acclaim, the jury charged with selecting the 1941 National Literary Prize did not choose *The Garden of Forking Paths* as the recipient of the award. Many Argentinean writers and critics were outraged, and they subsequently dedicated an entire issue of *Sur*, an important literary magazine, to a consideration of his work. Nevertheless, even among those critics who felt he should have received the award, there was some reservation. Most commonly, these reservations focused on his cerebral style and his esoteric subject matter.

Other critics, however, found Borges's work to be important and original. In his book *Jorge Luis Borges*, Martin Stabb cites, for instance, Pedro Henriquez Urena's famous comment: "There may be those who think that Borges is original because he proposes to be. I think quite the contrary: Borges would be original even when he might propose not to be."

In the early 1940s the translation of his work into English began in literary magazines, although it was not

until the early 1960s that whole collections were translated and published. However, the work made an immediate impact. John Updike presented an important survey of his work in the *New Yorker* in 1965, a review in which he noted his fascination with calling attention to a work of literature *as* a work of literature. Another seminal article on Borges by the novelist John Barth appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1967. In the article, Barth discussed the literature of the 1960s, placing Borges at the center of such literature. In addition, Barth paid careful attention to his use of the labyrinth as an image in his work.

Other critics attempt to trace the influences on Borges's work. Andre Maurois, in a preface to Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby's edition of *Labyrinths*, directly addresses his sources. He cites H. G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe, G. K. Chesterton, and Franz Kafka as important influences on Borges's writing. Borges himself noted in several places the debt he owed to Chesterton, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Rudyard Kipling.

"The Aleph" "The Aleph" is conventionally praised as one of Borges's most important stories. In her 1965 study Borges the Labyrinth Maker, Ana Maria Barrenechea argues that "the most important of Borges's concerns is the conviction that the world is a chaos impossible to reduce to any human law." She specifically praises "The Aleph" as an example of "the economy of Borges's work" in its ability to erase "the limits of reality" and create in the reader "an atmosphere of anxiety." In his 1969 study, Ronald Christ contends that "The Aleph" stands as wholly representative of Borges's art and his attempts to "abbreviate the universe in literature." To Christ, the Aleph of the story's title is a symbol of Borges's style and desire to compose another of his "resumes of the universe." Martin S. Stabb, in his 1970 book Jorge Luis Borges, suggests that "The Aleph" is Borges's attempt to explore his dominant themes in a lighthearted fashion that may not possess the depth of his other work that reads as a "half-philosophical, basically playful composition—generously sprinkled with Borgesian irony and satire." Perhaps the most effusive praise of the story comes from George R. McMurray, who (in his 1980 study Jorge Luis Borges) states that the story not only reflects the "mystical aura of magic that imbues so many of Borges's works," but also "emerges as a symbol of all literature, whose purpose ... is to subvert objective reality and recreate it through the powers of imagination."

Responses to Literature

 Look at some of the other writers of the Latin American "boom." What are some of the countries that produced important writers after World War II? What political or social changes happened in those countries that these writers comment on in their works?

- 2. Borges lived during a very tumultuous time in Argentine history. What were the important political events in Argentina from 1900 to 1986? What happened in the 1970s and 1980s? Why do you think many of the Latin American writers who were influenced by Borges criticized his refusal to write about politics?
- 3. Research the philosophical puzzles known as the paradoxes of Zeno and Pascal's sphere. How do stories such as "The Aleph" dramatize these paradoxes in narrative form?
- 4. Part of what makes "The Aleph" a success is Borges's setting it in an everyday location and describing the fantastic event in everyday language. Compose a story in which a character discovers a fantastic object or event and use Borges's style to describe it. How does the use of everyday language heighten the believability of the event for the reader?
- 5. Literary allusions are references within a story to other historical or literary figures, events, or objects. Try to identify at least five allusions in "The Garden of Forking Paths." Look up the allusions in a dictionary and/or encyclopedia. How does your understanding of the story change with your understanding of these allusions?

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■ Maryse Boucolon

See Maryse Conde

Blizabeth Bowen

BORN: 1899, Dublin, Ireland DIED: 1973, London, England NATIONALITY: British, Irish

GENRE: *Fiction*MAJOR WORKS:

The House in Paris (1935) Death of the Heart (1938)

The Demon Lover, and Other Stories (1945)



Elizabeth Bowen Bowen, Elizabeth, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Overview

Elizabeth Bowen was an Anglo-Irish author whose fiction typically attends carefully to realistic details of both character and place. In her best stories as well as in her novels, Bowen unobtrusively steers readers through the geography of motives and interactions on which human identity and human character depend.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Anglo-Irish Heritage Elizabeth Bowen was born in Dublin, Ireland, on June 7, 1899 to Henry Charles Cole Bowen and Florence Colley. Her family can be traced to Welsh, not English, ancestors, but critics and biographers have considered her heritage, as did Bowen herself, "classic Anglo-Irish."

Illnesses Split Family Apart During her first five or six years of life, most of each year was spent in Dublin, where her father was first a lawyer in private practice, then an official of the Land Commission; during the summer the family moved to Bowen's Court, in County Cork, Ireland, which had been the Bowen family seat for years.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bowen's famous contemporaries include:

Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (1900–2000): Queen Consort of King George VI of the United Kingdom, known as the Queen Mother after her husband's death; during the Blitz, Germany's bombing of London in World War II, she famously refused to leave London, winning the hearts of the British.

Robert Graves (1895–1985): British novelist and poet; well known for his memoir of World War I, *Goodbye to All That* (1929), as well as for his historical novel *I*, *Claudius* (1934), about the Roman emperor.

P. G. Wodehouse (1881–1975): English writer, many of whose short stories and novels center on a hapless aristocrat and his unflappable butler; he also wrote plays and lyrics for musicals, including *Anything Goes* (1934).

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): English modernist novelist and writer, part of the influential Bloomsbury literary group; her essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929) argued that women must have private space in order to be able to create.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): Irish poet and playwright, who favored Ireland's independence from England; awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923.

By the time she was seven, however, her father was hospitalized for mental illness, and she and her mother moved to England to stay with relatives while he recovered. In 1912, as the family began preparations to reunite, Bowen's mother was diagnosed with cancer; her death soon afterward left Elizabeth in the care of what she called "a committee of aunts" from her mother's large family. She was educated at Downe House, a boarding school in Kent, England, and at the London Council School of Art, which she left after two terms in 1919. Thus, her young years were somewhat sheltered from the turmoil that had engulfed Europe during World War I (1914–1919).

Short Stories, Marriage, and Increased Productivity It was when she was living on her own in London that Bowen began to write seriously. Her first short story collection, Encounters, appeared in 1923, the same year she married Alan Charles Cameron. Their move in 1926 to Oxford opened Bowen to a stimulating literary circle that included the critics C. M. Bowra and Lord David Cecil, and writers Evelyn Waugh, Edith Sitwell, Walter de la Mare, and Aldous Huxley. By 1929, she had published two more volumes of short stories and two novels, establishing a rate of production she would maintain much of her life.

Influential Associations Bowen published three other novels by 1935—Friends and Relations (1931), To the North (1932), and The House in Paris (1935)—and in 1935 Cameron and Bowen moved to London. This move, like the move to Oxford, enhanced Bowen's career. She began to associate with Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury literary circle in London, wrote reviews for the Tatler magazine in addition to her regular writing of fiction.

In 1937 Bowen was elected to the Irish Academy of Letters. *The Death of the Heart*, her sixth novel, was published in 1938. To many Bowen critics it represents the pinnacle of her achievements as a writer of fiction. Its narrative mode incorporates an expertly handled multiplicity of viewpoints that evoke a multiplicity of responses to a single event or situation.

Influence of the War Years World War II dominated much of Bowen's life in London and the writing she produced during this period. Her experiences living and working as an air-raid warden in London during World War II inspired what many critics consider her finest short story collection, The Demon Lover, and Other Stories (1945). In these stories she introduced a hallucinatory tone and supernatural themes in order to convey war's effect on the human mind.

Career Advances Despite Personal Loss In 1948, Bowen was made a Commander of the British Empire and, in 1949, she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters by Trinity College, Dublin. During the same year The Heat of the Day was published to glowing reviews. Before this novel was published, Bowen had produced two new collections of short stories, a selection of previously published short stories, a radio play, a critical study of the novel, two volumes of memoirs and family history, and a play (coauthored with John Perry and produced in 1948, although never published). She also continued to write the reviews and critical articles that appeared regularly in various periodicals. The Camerons moved from London to Bowen's Court in Ireland in 1952, which she had inherited in 1930. That same year Alan Cameron died. In 1957, Bowen was awarded a Doctor of Letters by Oxford University. Following her husband's death Bowen remained at the family home until 1959, when she decided to sell Bowen's Court and return to England.

In 1964, *The Little Girls*, a novel set in Kent, England, where she had lived with her mother during her father's illness, was published. Her last novel was *Eva Trout* (1969), for which she received the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1970. During the last four years of her life Bowen was in declining health, suffering from repeated bouts of respiratory illness. In 1972, she learned that she had lung cancer, from which she died on February 22, 1973.

Works in Literary Context

Elizabeth Bowen's works are often compared with Katherine Mansfield's because of her extreme sensitivity to perceptions of light, atmosphere, color, and sound. Like Mansfield, Bowen is considered expert at presenting the emotional dynamics of a situation and then swiftly illuminating their significance, particularly within the prescribed bounds of the short story. Her work also has been compared to that of Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Henry James, and Jane Austen. Her work is also heavily influenced by her experiences in war-time London.

The Ghosts of War In his introduction to The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen Angus Wilson notes that Bowen's stories may be some of the best records any future generation will have of London during the war and of the psychological violence and tenderness that the war evoked. Through the stories in The Demon Lover, and Other Stories readers may also gain an appreciation for Bowen's ghosts—spirits that are rarely malign but that seem to elucidate the "real" world. In "The Happy Autumn Fields" Mary prefers to dwell in a past peopled by ghosts inspired by letters that are more real than her own bombed house. London exists as its own moonlit ghost in "Mysterious Kor," a story that superbly displays Bowen's painting with words and also shows the threads of feeling that may become entangled in times of war. And the title story, "The Demon Lover," introduces the ghost or "demon" born of one woman's fickle nature.

Works in Critical Context

While acclaimed in her lifetime for both her short stories and novels, since her death Elizabeth Bowen has slipped from critical attention. Some critics suggest that her romanticism, wit, and sensitivity to both language and feeling have gone out of style; others assert that her writing is flawed by a too-simple style and narrow range of characters. Nonetheless, Bowen is revered by many for the radiance of style and subtlety of expression shown perhaps most assuredly in her short stories.

Angus Wilson notes that her stories may be some of the best records any future generation will have of London during World War II and of the psychological violence and tenderness that the war evoked. Some critics find that the short story seems an even more appropriate form than the novel for Bowen's psychological portraits and powerful sense of the period.

Bowen was "a highly conscious artist," Walter Allen wrote in *The Modern Novel* (1954), who "evolved over the years a prose style that has the elaboration, the richness of texture, the allusiveness of poetry, a prose as carefully wrought, as subtle in its implications, as that of Henry James in his last phase." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer summarized her reputation by noting that "critics generally consider *The Death of the Heart* her best novel; some call it one of the best English novels of the century."

Responses to Literature

1. Elizabeth Bowen was a prolific writer, often publishing a novel each year. Do you think this meant

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Some of Elizabeth Bowen's best-regarded works deal with the psychological effects of World War II. Here are some other works examining the human impact of war.

War Poems (1919), a poetry collection by Sigfried Sassoon. The poems in this book echo Sassoon's own experience fighting in World War I and established him as an important British poet.

War Trash (2005), a novel by Ha Jin. This work examines the situation of a Chinese soldier during the Korean War, who is sent by his government to fight for the Communist side, but is captured by the enemy instead. The Wind That Shakes the Barley (2006), a film directed by Ken Loach. This critically acclaimed movie traces the political development of an Irish student during the early days of the Irish Republican Army, which violently opposed British rule.

Half of a Yellow Sun, (2006), a novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This story takes place in Nigeria in the 1960s, when a civil war was raging and traces its effects through the lives of a teenage boy and two sisters.

A Long Way Gone (2007), a memoir by Ishmael Beah. This work tells the story of a twelve-year boy forced to become a child soldier during Sierra Leone's Civil War in the 1990s.

that she had more imagination than less-published authors, or was she simply more disciplined?

- 2. After reading one of Bowen's novels, discuss what aspects of the novel's style or structure might seem to modern critics to be out of fashion. Did you find the novel old-fashioned? Point out specific passages to support your argument.
- 3. Using your library and the Internet, research the Anglo-Irish during the early part of the twentieth century. Write an essay analyzing how their life in Ireland changed with the growing movement toward Irish independence. Do you feel sympathetic toward them? Explain your feelings.
- 4. Bowen's life and work were heavily influenced by her experience of World War II in England. To find out more about the Battle of Britain (as the German attacks on Britain were called), read Stephen Bungay's *The Most Dangerous Enemy: A History of the Battle of Britain* (2001).

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Bertolt Brecht

BORN: 1898, Augsburg, Germany

DIED: 1956, East Berlin, German Democratic

Republic

NATIONALITY: German

GENRE: Drama, Poetry, Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Drums in the Night (1922) The Threepenny Opera (1928) Fear and Misery of the Third Reich (1938) The Good Woman of Szechwan (1943) Mother Courage and Her Children (1949)

Overview

Bertolt Brecht's status as one of the major playwrights of the twentieth century is largely uncontested. In addition to writing a significant body of plays that are performed all over the world, Brecht also developed in a number of theoretical writings his theory of "epic" or "didactic" theater, which he applied to the "model" productions of his own plays in the early 1950s. He hoped his plays would instruct as well as entertain. His goal was to make audiences think about what might be, rather than what was. His work, influenced by German social theorist Karl Marx, was often violent and chaotic. "Epic theater" became known throughout the world and would affect the work of generations of dramatists. In addition to being an influential playwright, Brecht is considered a poet of considerable power and originality. More recently, his prose fiction has attracted increased attention.



Bertolt Brecht Brecht, Bertolt, Paris, 1954, photograph. Lipnitzki / Roger Viollet / Getty Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Controversial Pacifist Eugen Berthold Brecht—he later dropped the first name and changed the spelling of the middle name—was born in Augsburg, Germany into a fairly well-to-do bourgeois family on February 10, 1898. His father, Friedrich Berthold Brecht, an employee of a paper factory, advanced to the position of business director; Brecht's mother was Sofie Brezing Brecht. Brecht attended elementary and high school in Augsburg. Having failed to educate his teachers (as he put it), he began to write occasional poems. In 1914 he had a short play, The Bible, published in the school journal.

Although he wrote a few patriotic poems at the outbreak of World War I, Brecht's antiwar sentiments developed early. His criticism of Horace's dictum "Dulce est et decorum pro patria mori" ("It is sweet and honorable to die for the fatherland") almost led to his expulsion from school. Various journals and newspapers printed poems and stories by the fledgling author, who liked to play the guitar, pursue amorous adventures, and roam through countryside, fairs, and pubs with a group of similarly dissatisfied friends.

Blacklisted by the Nazis In 1917 Brecht moved to Munich, enrolled at the university, read many books, scouted the theater scene, became increasingly involved in literary circles, and tried his hand at several projects, among them one-act plays and a full-fledged drama, Baal

(published, 1922; performed, 1923). Even the one-act plays written in 1919 exhibit features that were to become his trademark. *The Beggar, or the Dead Dog,* for example, confronts the extreme opposites of the social scale: the world of the emperor and the world of the beggar. In *Lux in Tenebris* Brecht uses the theme of prostitution on several levels for his attack on what he considers the physical, spiritual, and social corruption of the upper middle class, whose perversion of the spirit, language, and action is highlighted by parodying certain scenes from the Bible (which was to become one of his major literary sources) via the characters' actions.

Shortly before the end of World War I, Brecht, who had enrolled in medical studies to avoid the draft, was called to military service nevertheless. As a hospital orderly he witnessed the suffering of victims of war and disease. He wrote the satiric "Legend of the Dead Soldier," in which a corpse is revived to be declared fit for military service again. This antiwar ballad was sung in the fourth act of *Drums in the Night* (1922) and was one of the reasons Brecht was put on the blacklist of the Nazis (the socialist political party that would rise to power in the 1930s under Adolf Hitler) as early as 1923. After the war Brecht witnessed the turbulent beginning of the Weimar Republic (the post–World War I regime in Germany) and the power struggle among political parties.

Embracing Communism Brecht wrote his first work of "epic theater," the 1926 play A Man's a Man. This is also one of a series of didactic (instructional) plays, works in which Brecht expressed his newfound commitment to the philosophy of communism. Less overtly political, and one of the playwright's most popular productions, is the 1928 The Threepenny Opera, which also formed the basis of Brecht's only novel. One of several collaborations with composer Kurt Weill, The Threepenny Opera is an extravaganza of humor, bitterness, and social criticism. Brecht based this drama on John Gay's The Beggar's Opera (1728). Throughout his career, Brecht adapted the works of other authors, transforming them with modern and highly original interpretations. His literary knowledge allowed him to combine a wide range of influences in his work, including Spanish, Far Eastern, and Elizabethan drama, popular songs, folk literature, and films.

Exile and Productivity in the United States In 1933 Brecht's Marxist politics forced him to leave fascist Germany and go into self-imposed exile in Scandinavia and the United States. Later, the Nazi government annulled the playwright's citizenship. While in exile Brecht became an anti-Nazi propagandist, writing for a German-language periodical published in Moscow and composing the 1938 drama Fear and Misery of the Third Reich. During this time Brecht also wrote what are critically regarded as his greatest works.

From the outbreak of World War II in 1939, until 1947, Brecht lived in the United States. In that time, he

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brecht's famous contemporaries include:

Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934): Hindenburg was sixty-six when he became a national hero after commanding the German army to victory at the Battle of Tannenberg in 1914. Named supreme commander of the German Army in 1917, Hindenburg was later elected second President of the German Republic in 1925. Despite his failing health, he was re-elected at age eighty-four, but was unable to stop Adolf Hitler from effectively seizing power. Upon Hindenburg's death, Hitler became the Führer of Germany, effectively ending the Republic.

Dorothy Parker (1893–1967): American writer and poet, best known for her wisecracks and sharp wit. Parker was a founding member of the Algonquin Round Table and was nominated for two Academy Awards.

Karl Valentin (1882–1948): Comedian, author, and filmmaker, Valentin was a major influence on and active in the German Expressionist movement of the 1920s.

Max Schreck (1879–1936): Best remembered today as the titular vampire in the 1922 film *Nosferatu*, Schreck was also an experienced theater actor who appeared in several of Brecht's early plays.

W. Somerset Maugham (1874–1965): English playwright, novelist, and short story writer. Maugham was one of the most popular authors of his era and one of the highest paid during the 1930s.

Karl Korsch (1886–1961): German Marxist theorist, he maintained a distance from established mainstream Communist doctrine of his time. He emphasized the need to adapt Marxism to the realities of the twentieth century.

worked on several motion picture productions and wrote three plays. But his work in America was not warmly received, and Brecht did not receive the United States warmly, either. He never applied for citizenship. During the late 1940s and 1950s, the United States was in the initial stages of the so-called Cold War with the Soviet Union, and a feeling of extreme paranoia regarding the dangers of communism pervaded society and the government. It was perhaps inevitable that he would be called before the communist-hunting House Un-American Activities Committee and questioned about his communist connections. Almost immediately, he left the United States to return to Germany. When asked by a friend if he had indeed done anything "un-American," Brecht is said to have replied, "I am not an American." He chose to live in communist East Berlin. He and his wife Helene Weigel founded a theater company there, the Berliner Ensemble,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Brecht returned often to the theme of class conflict between supposedly "superior" and "inferior" people, and the promotion of the causes of the lower classes. Other works that address these themes include:

The Plague (1947), a novel by Albert Camus. This novel explores the human condition by examining the reactions of the residents of a city during an outbreak of plague. Arbitrary class divisions disintegrate in the face of death, only to rear up again once the epidemic has passed.

Monsieur Verdoux (1947), a film directed by Charlie Chaplin. The darkest of Chaplin's comedies, this film centers on an unemployed banker who marries and murders wealthy widows in order to support his family. He justifies his behavior by saying that he is simply doing what businessmen and soldiers do every day.

Trainspotting (1993), a novel by Irvine Welsh. By presenting a story narrated from the point of view of heroin junkies, Welsh challenges the reader to identify with the lowest of lower-class characters in true Brechtian fashion.

Angels in America (1990), a play by Tony Kushner.

Another work that focuses on a marginalized group, in this case gay men dealing with the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. Kushner was also heavily influenced by Brecht's use of multiple points of perspective and the chronicle play, all of which are in evidence in this epic work.

where Brecht produced his own plays as well as adaptations of Shakespeare and Molière.

Gradually, however, Brecht's health began to fail. He died on August 14, 1956.

Works in Literary Context

Brecht's ability to express his political and philosophical views in fresh and formally ingenious ways is also observable in his poetry, which he produced throughout his career. In both poetry and drama he attained one of the most controlled and completely realized aesthetic visions in literature. During the last part of his life, Brecht returned to Berlin and formed his own company, the Berliner Ensemble, enabling him to implement his dramatic theories and gaining him the admiration of devotees of dramatic art.

Farcical Satire In style, Brecht's early works tend toward farcical satire; they show some influence of the Munich comedian Karl Valentin, whose witty dialog-sketches Brecht admired and with whom he had performed in sideshows at fairs. Brecht's first full-fledged

play, *Baal*, glorifies unfettered, amoral individualism, reflecting, to some extent, Brecht's own lifestyle and his sympathy for such figures as Frank Wedekind, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and François Villon. It is both a literary and a social protest.

Social Concerns Brecht's genius for artistic invention and his desire to motivate social concerns in the playgoer combine in his mature dramas to form a rich and varied view of existence. Through the crisis of its scientist hero, Galileo (1943) reexamines Brecht's recurrent theme of the obstacles to social progress. Yet despite its focus on philosophical issues, critics find in this play a strong main character who, along with the protagonist of Mother Courage and Her Children (1949), enlists the spectator's feelings as well as reason. In his mature works Brecht transcended the single-minded message of his earlier didactic pieces and achieved a more complex viewpoint than that permitted by the official policies and doctrines of communism.

Works in Critical Context

The Threepenny Opera Well known in Germany during his life, Brecht became recognized as a major dramatist by critics throughout Europe and the United States only after his death. His best-known plays, The Threepenny Opera and Mother Courage and Her Children, are both considered highly influential on later dramatists. The Threepenny Opera was one of Brecht's collborations with composer Kurt Weill. The musical comedy features the song "Die Moritat vom Mackie Messer," translated in English as "Mack the Knife," which became a jazz standard recorded by the likes of Louis Armstrong and Frank Sinatra. Though set in London, the play conveys perhaps like no other work of literature the moral malaise of the German Weimar Republic. As Ben Brantley writes, "the show's real satiric targets were the middle classes of poverty-crippled, rudderless Germany in the 1920s." The play is hard-edged and dirty, peopled by low-lifes-murderers, prostitutes, and thieves. As critic Arthur Lazere contends, "Brecht's text is sardonic and brittle...every character would sell out any other if an advantage is to be gained." As Brantley notes, "the play was designed to sustain an intellectual distance, to allow audiences to see their own reflections in vicious thugs, whores, beggars and policemen motivated by the same primal needs and instincts as themselves." It was an immediate hit in Europe, but something of a flop at first in the United States. It was not until the 1954 off-Broadway production featuring famed German actress Lotte Lenya (Weill's widow) that the play was hailed as a masterpiece in America.

Mother Courage and Her Children In the program notes to a recently staged production of Mother Courage and Her Children by the New York Public

Theater, artistic director Oscar Eustis called Brecht's work "the greatest play of the twentieth century." Certainly, it is among the most powerful anti-war works in literature, and was written in direct response to the rise of the Nazis in Germany. However, the play is also very long and difficult to stage, and successful productions are rare. The play hinges on the characterization of the character of Mother Courage herself, and the exact nature of the character is a matter of much critical debate. Some have branded Mother Courage as a greedy coward; others laud her practicality and toughness. Her "true" nature is complex, and thus hard to portray on stage.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Pick one of Brecht's plays and analyze his stage directions. Do you feel they are effective? How do they complement the dialog? What sort of atmosphere do they create?
- 2. Write about Brecht's time in exile. How did it affect his popularity? How did his writing change? Do you think his exile was beneficial or harmful?
- 3. Research Karl Marx and the tenets of Marxism. Analyze one of Brecht's plays for its Marxist undertones. How does Brecht express his political views in the play?
- 4. Using his *Writings on Theater* as a starting point, summarize Brecht's thoughts on epic theater. Which of his plays successfully implement these views?

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Breyten Breytenbach

BORN: 1939, Bonnievale, South Africa NATIONALITY: French, South African

GENRE: *Poetry* MAJOR WORKS:

Season in Paradise (1980)

The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist (1985)

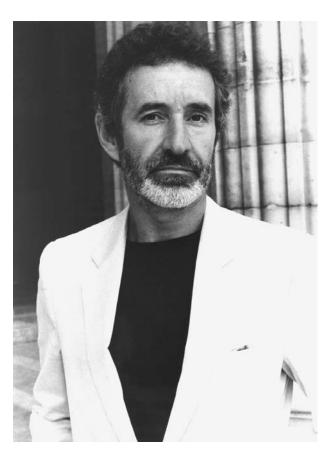
Return to Paradise (1993)

Overview

Breyten Breytenbach is one of the major postwar poets writing in Afrikaans, the language derived from Dutch and spoken by the first white settlers in South Africa. In his works he alternates between outrage at South Africa's governmental policies of economic and political repression of nonwhites, and, on the other hand, love for his country and its landscape.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up an Afrikaner Breyten Breytenbach was born September 16, 1939, in Bonnievale, South Africa, to Johannes Stephanus and Catherina Johanna Cloete. The Breytenbach family was among the early European settlers of the seventeenth century who called themselves Afrikaners—the group that would rule South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s under a system known as apartheid, which is Afrikaans for "separateness." This government-sponsored system involved des-



Breyten Breytenbach Breytenbach, Breyten, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

ignating certain buildings, areas, and services for use only by certain races and forbade people of different races from marrying. It also led to the segregation of living areas within South Africa, with black citizens of different cultural groups kept separate from each other; this allowed the white Afrikaners, who made up a small percentage of the population, to remain in control of the large nonwhite population. Though Breytenbach was a member of the ruling Afrikaners, witnessing the unfairness of apartheid firsthand helped to shape much of his later work.

Life in Paris and Early Works After high school, Breytenbach attended the University of Cape Town, leaving school at age twenty and then traveling to Europe. In 1961, Breytenbach settled in Paris, where he painted, wrote, and taught English, and where he married Yolande Ngo Thi Hoang Lien, who was born in Vietnam. His unusual paintings and drawings, often of self-referential figures with bodies of distorted proportions, are always featured on his book covers or are used as illustrations in his books. The integration of the pictorial and verbal in his work is part of his attempt to transcend genre boundaries.

In 1964, Breytenbach published *Die Ysterkoei Moet Sweet (The Iron Cow Must Sweat)*, his first book of poems. The title comes from a Zen proverb indicating that the miraculous must happen before nothingness can be destroyed. This was followed by *Die Huis van die Dowe (House of the Deaf*, 1967) and *Kouevuur (Gangrene*, 1969), which contains the first indications of a serious concern with South African politics. Two non-political volumes of poetry followed *Kouevuur: Lotus* (1970), under the name Jan Blom, and *Met Andere Woorde: Vrugte van die Droom van Stilte (In Other Words: Fruit from the Dream of Silence*, 1973). Both were extensively influenced by Zen Buddhism.

In 1972, Breytenbach's most outspokenly political poetry at that point was published, *Skryt: Om 'n sinkende skip blou te verf (Scryer: To Paint a Sinking Ship Blue)*. One of the editions of the book was banned in South Africa in 1975, apparently because of a poem to the prime minister, which is followed by a list of names of detainees who had died in detention. The ban on the book was not lifted until 1985.

Return to South Africa Breytenbach wanted to return to South Africa to collect poetry awards he had won in 1967 and 1969, but his wife was refused an entry visa as a "nonwhite" and Breytenbach was told he could face arrest under the Immorality Act, which made interracial marriage a crime. But in 1973, when Met Ander Woorde was published, the Breytenbachs were both issued three-month visas to visit South Africa. That journey back to his homeland after twelve years of exile in Paris both rekindled warm childhood memories and reinforced his anger at the violence and injustice of apartheid. Breytenbach recorded his homecoming impressions in a

book of poetry and prose, published in a censored version in South Africa in 1976 as 'N seisoen in die Paradys and in English translation in 1980 as A Season in Paradise.

By the end of his stay, Breytenbach had so exasperated the authorities with his scathing public criticism of the Afrikaner nationalist government that they told him not to come back. Upon his return to Paris with his wife, however, he renewed his ties with antiapartheid groups. Ultimately he founded—with other white South Africans in exile—an antiapartheid organization called Okhela ("ignite the flame" in Zulu). They decided that Breytenbach should travel undercover to South Africa to make contacts to channel money from European church groups to black trade unionists in South Africa.

Fight Against Apartheid and Imprisonment In August 1975, Breytenbach flew to Johannesburg under an assumed name with a false passport. The South African security police shadowed and then arrested him, charging him under the Terrorist Act. He was sentenced to nine years in prison for the intent with which he had entered the country. The court took the view that trade union campaigns against apartheid constituted a threat to the safety of the state. In November 1975, Breytenbach began solitary confinement in Pretoria's maximum security section.

He wrote many poems while in prison. He produced *Voetskrif* (*Foot Script*, 1976) while he was in detention and awaiting trial. Once Breytenbach was sentenced, no new writing of his was allowed to appear. This led to the publication of old unpublished material, anthologies, and translations of his work, including *Sinking Ship Blues* (1977) and *And Death as White as Words* (1978), which was banned in South Africa on publication.

Imprisonment brought international attention to Breytenbach. The French government brought diplomatic pressure to bear on Pretoria, South Africa's capital, which intensified when the socialist government of François Mitterand came to power. In December 1982, the South African government changed Breytenbach's sentence from nine years to seven. He returned to Paris and became a French citizen in 1983.

Prison Poetry In 1983, the first volume in a series conceived as a cycle appeared, titled *Eklips* (*Eclipse*). This volume was followed in 1983 by Yk, Buffalo Bill: Panem et Circenses (Buffalo Bill: Bread and Circuses, 1984), and Lewendood (Life and Death, 1985). Most of the titles in the prison cycle refer to living on the brink of death, or to a living death.

Translations in English of Breytenbach's prison poems appeared in *Judas Eye* (1988). These poems were translated mostly by Breytenbach himself. In many of the poems, he expresses the end of his relationship with Afrikaans and announces it is a dead language.

Prison Novels While he was in prison, Breytenbach also wrote the semifictional pieces subsequently published and

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Breytenbach's famous contemporaries include:

Stephen Biko (1946–1977): South African antiapartheid activist and founder of the Black Consciousness Movement; died of massive head injuries while in police custody.

Rosa Parks (1913–2005): Called "the mother of the American civil rights movement," in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, Parks refused to move to the "colored" section of a bus so a white passenger could have her seat. Her subsequent arrest sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Helen Suzman (1917–): South African politician and member of Parliament for thirty-six years; from 1962 to 1974, was the only member of Parliament completely opposed to apartheid.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925–2006): leading Indonesian novelist and writer; spent extensive time in prison and under house arrest for political activity.

Desmond Tutu (1931–): The first black Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa; received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his work to end apartheid.

translated under the title *Mouroir: Mirrornotes of a Novel* (1984). The book is a series of loosely connected stories or sketches that present an imagistic, surreal portrait of Breytenbach's psyche as a prisoner. Its complexity relates to the fact that the manuscript had to be handed over to the prison guards on a daily basis.

On his release from prison, Breytenbach felt compelled to publish a more direct account of his experiences. The result was *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1985), which describes his years of physical and psychological deprivation, and outlines the prospects for South Africa's future.

Later Work Memory of Snow and of Dust (1989), the first book with material written after Breytenbach's release, is more fictional than the works based on his prison experience. Breytenbach's 1993 memoir Return to Paradise chronicles a 1991 return visit to his homeland. According to the author, this title, along with A Season in Paradise and The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, is meant to be read as a series.

In 1998, Breytenbach scandalized Afrikaner audiences with his three-hour-long play Boklied: 'n Vermaaklikheid in Drie Bedrywe (Goat Song: An Entertainment in Three Acts), which contained some graphic sexual scenes. In 1998 Dog Heart: A Travel Memoir was published, which marks a return to the world and the legends of Breytenbach's youth, with short prose texts interspersed with poetry.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Breytenbach is a political exile, a fact that inevitably informs his work. Here are some other works that deal with the condition of being an exile.

After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives (1986), a nonfiction work by Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr. Said, a Palestinian exile, wrote the text for this book of photographic portraits of Palestinians.

Fahrenheit 451 (1953), a novel by Ray Bradbury. In this science fiction novel, a firefighter grows increasingly alienated from his society, in which his job is to burn books that are forbidden.

The Thickness of Skin of a Dead Cat (1978), a novel by Celedonio Gonzalez. This novel by the Cuban writer urges Cubans living in the United States to make the most of their lives in this country.

Thoughts Abroad (1970), a collection of poetry by Dennis Brutus. Poems by a leading black South African poet and political activist that deal with exile; published under a pseudonym, the book was banned in South Africa when its author's identity was discovered.

Women in Exile (1994), a nonfiction work by Mahnaz Afkami. Nonfiction portraits of twelve women, plus Afkami, living in political exile in the United States; their countries of origin include Sudan, Chile, China, and Argentina.

Breytenbach currently divides his time between South Africa and Europe while regularly traveling to other parts of the world.

Works in Literary Context

In a contemporary review in *Die Burger*, the prominent poet W. E. G. Louw referred to Breytenbach as an "Afrikaans [Dutch Golden Age poet Gerbrand] Bredero or [French Symbolist poet Paul] Verlaine." Breytenbach was a major figure in the generation of authors known in Afrikaans as the "Sestigers" (literally, "Sixties'ers," referring to authors who came to the forefront during the 1960s). They were especially influential in changing the political perceptions of young intellectual Afrikaners who identified with their vocal criticism of apartheid.

Love and Hate for South Africa Breytenbach's texts are marked by a love-hate relationship with the country of South Africa and the language of Afrikaans. Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer commented: "If Breytenbach's imagery is to be compared with anyone's it is that of Czeslaw Milosz, with whom he shares an intense response to nature and a way of interpreting politically

determined events and their human consequences through the subtleties of the physical world."

Works in Critical Context

The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist Joseph Lelyveld, writing in the New York Times Book Review, speculated that Breytenbach's "confessions" are "an important contribution to a corpus of South African prison literature that has been steadily, painfully accumulating over the last quarter-century; and they are especially important since his is the first such memoir to have been written by an Afrikaner." Rob Nixon, writing in American Book Review, came to a similar conclusion. In the confessions themselves, he says, Breytenbach "meticulously recreates his spell in prison, interrogating with undiminished insight, not only his own shifting selves but also his jailmates and the motley flunkeys of apartheid whose job it was to ensure that he remained solitary but not private." Like Lelyveld, Nixon viewed The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist as an important document in South Africa's rich "traditions of prison literature... partly because Brevten Brevtenbach is firstly an established writer and only secondarily a political activist... and partly because he is a rare and important defector from Afrikanerdom."

Return to Paradise J. M. Coetzee, a fellow South African novelist writing in the New York Review of Books, decried Breytenbach's analysis of the state of South Africa in Return to Paradise as "not...original." However, along with other reviewers, he praised Breytenbach's narrative: "An immensely gifted writer, he is able to descend effortlessly into the Africa of the poetic unconscious and return with the rhythm and the words, the words in the rhythm, that give life." Adam Kuper in the Times Literary Supplement concurred: "The best parts of this book have nothing to do with politics. They are the occasional descriptions of landscapes, rendered with the intensity of a painter, and the portraits of his Afrikaner friends." William Finnegan, in the New York Times Book Review, noted that "purposeful reporting is not Mr. Breytenbach's forte" but declared the book to be "protean, funny, bitchy, beautifully written and searingly bleak."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Read *My Life as a Traitor*, a memoir by Zarah Ghahramani. Do you believe in any cause strongly enough to be jailed for it?
- 2. Do you think it is easier to advocate for the rights of a minority if you are part of the majority culture because you have the protection of belonging to the majority? Or is it more difficult, because you are going against your own culture and upsetting the social order even though your own life may not be adversely affected by the wrongs being done?

- 3. Recent figures indicate that one out of one hundred Americans is in prison. Using your library's resources or the Internet, research conditions in the U.S. prison system. Do you think prisoners are rehabilitated and ready to start a new life when they are released, or are they damaged by their prison experience and ready to continue a life of crime? With so many people in jail, what are the implications for our society? Which states have the highest success rates with rehabilitation, and why would that be the case in those particular states? In which countries in the world are the prisons still primitive? Why are they like that?
- 4. Look up the definitions of terrorism and resistance. Research one of the following groups, designated terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department: the Tamil Tigers (Sri Lanka), the Irish Republican Army (Northern Ireland), Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone), or ETA (Spain). Write an essay arguing whether this group is a true terrorist group, or whether it should be considered a resistance movement. What is the difference? Use specific examples to support your argument.
- 5. In the United States today, many colleges and universities are researching their role in the slave trade during the 1700s and 1800s, in order to take responsibility for their past actions. What is our responsibility in the present for the harm our ancestors caused? Does working through the past bring old issues to light so they can be resolved, or does it keep old wounds open and make a new start impossible? Write an essay developing your point of view.

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Maré Brink

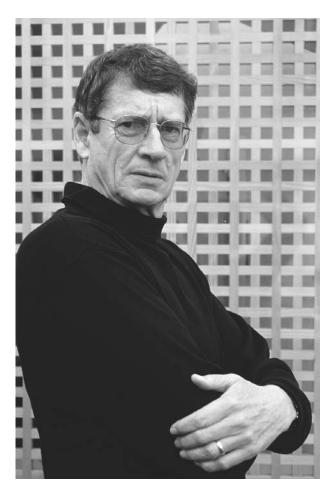
BORN: 1935, Vrede, South Africa NATIONALITY: South African GENRE: Drama, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Looking on Darkness (1973) A Dry White Season (1980) On the Contrary (1994)

Overview

André Brink's career has run parallel to developments that took his native South Africa from a state marked by apartheid—the government policy that maintained a system that disenfranchised, exploited, and radically oppressed all nonwhites in the country—to the dismantling of this system of racial injustice. Through his work, he has promoted an awareness of the problems of his society,



André Brink Ulf Andersen / Getty Images

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brink's famous contemporaries include:

J. M. Coetzee (1940–): A prominent South African novelist and essayist whose works describe his feelings of alienation from fellow Afrikaners. He won the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Tobias Wolff (1945–): An American writer whose memoir *This Boy's Life* was a huge popular success and whose novel *Old School* gained a fair deal of critical

Cyprian Ekwensi (1921–2007): A Nigerian writer credited with pioneering the Nigerian novel.

Nelson Mandela (1918–): The first democratically elected president of South Africa, Mandela was a strong antiapartheid activist—for which he served years in prison under the racist white regime.

Bob Dylan (1941–): An American poet, songwriter, and musician, Dylan's songs captured, defined, and influenced the sentiments of the 1960s.

explored their roots, and expressed opposition to repressive authorities, and now enjoys the freedom to explore a delight in storytelling. Brink was an existentialist when he began writing, citing Albert Camus among his significant influences. He developed a social conscience that was reinforced by strong reactions against his work, notably in the form of state censorship. In a country where Afrikaans was the language of whiteness, and hence of power, he was the first Afrikaner writer to be censored (for *Looking on Darkness*, 1973). He continues to write significant works today, the most recent of these being *Other Lives* (2008).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Seeing Clearly from Afar André Philippus Brink was born in Vrede, Orange Free State, South Africa on May 29, 1935. His father was a magistrate, and Brink's family was repeatedly relocated with his father's new appointments. Brink studied at Potchefstroom University, which he described as "a small Calvinist university." There, he took a bachelor of arts degree in 1955, a master's degree in English in 1958, and another master's in Afrikaans and Dutch in 1959. From 1959 to 1961, he settled in France to do postgraduate work in comparative literature at the Sorbonne. Brink commented that witnessing from afar the Sharpeville massacres in South Africa of March 1960—in which South African police fired at and killed 69 black protesters (wounding another 180 or so more, among these 50 women and children)—

forced him "to reexamine all the convictions and beliefs I had previously taken for granted."

Banned for His Conscience Returning to South Africa, Brink gained prominence as a spokesperson for the "Sestigers," a group of largely antiestablishment authors who wrote in Afrikaans. In the late 1960s Brink returned to Paris where, he relates, he found himself in the midst of the student revolt of 1968 and reevaluated the writer's role in society, concluding that he needed to return to South Africa to, as he put it, "assume my full responsibility for every word I write, within my society." The Generation of '68, as the students who revolted in Paris and elsewhere throughout France and Germany have come to be known, sought above all a more equitable society, a new distribution of power in their respective countries. For Brink, Looking on Darkness resulted. The work brought intimidation and harassment in the form of censorship, state confiscation of his typewriters, and death threats from white supremacists of all stripes. These reactions served to strengthen Brink's convictions, however, and he began to write all his work in English in order to permit publishing outside his country, and to acquire a wider, international readership. His method since has consisted of writing in both Afrikaans and English, translating back and forth.

A Professor and a Decorated Writer Brink was a faculty member in the Afrikaans and Dutch department at Rhodes University from 1961 until 1990, and became a professor of English at the University of Cape Town in 1991. He was president of the Afrikaans Writers Guild (1978–1980) and won recognition abroad with several awards, among them, the Médicis étranger prize (France) and the Martin L. King Memorial Prize (UK) for A Dry White Season in 1980. Further formal foreign recognition followed, especially in France, where he was named Chevalier, Legion of Honor 1982 and Commander, Order of Arts and Letters in 1992, distinctions that have allowed him to take a place alongside fellow South African writers like J. M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, and Athol Fugard.

In recent years, Brink has continued to win and receive nominations for a number of important literary awards and fellowships, including a Commonwealth Writers Prize for *The Other Side of Silence* (which he won in 2003). He is currently a professor emeritus of English at the University of Cape Town, where he continues to write. He has also published a wide variety of both literary criticism and journalism.

Works in Literary Context

As an emerging Afrikaans novelist in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Brink almost single-handedly modernized Afrikaans novel writing. Arguably the most eclectic South African writer at the time, he knocked the conservative Afrikaans literary tradition out of complacency with themes and techniques drawn from writers like Camus,

Samuel Beckett, Jean-Paul Sartre, Vladimir Nabokov, Henry Miller, William Faulkner, Graham Greene, and Lawrence Durrell. In 1974, the Afrikaner establishment was hit by the sensational news that Brink's *Kennis van die aand*, later translated into English as *Looking on Darkness*, had been banned. The banning created a major division between the state and many of the country's Afrikaans writers, and introduced a new era of increasingly vocal dissidence from within the establishment.

Banned for Challenging Racism In Brink's Looking on Darkness, the black protagonist, Joseph Malan, murders his white lover, Jessica Thomson, in a mutual pact and then sits in jail, awaiting execution. Calling the 1973 novel "ambitious and disturbing," Jane Larkin Crain concludes in the Saturday Review that "a passionately human vision rules here, informed by an imagination that is attuned at once to complex and important abstractions and to the rhythms and the texture of everyday experience." Noting that the "novel is structured in the form of a confessional," Martin Tucker adds in Commonweal that its style "is compelling: it is a work that throbs with personal intensity." Because of the novel's explicit treatment of sex, racism, persecution, and the torture of political prisoners in South African jails, C. J. Driver suggests in the Times Literary Supplement that it is not difficult to understand why it was banned; however, Driver concludes that "within its context this is a brave and important novel and in any terms a fine one."

European publication of Looking on Darkness coincided with the Soweto riots of 1976, and the novel became something of a handbook on the South African situation. The Soweto riots began as a peaceful protest against racist language policies in black schools, but ended with somewhere between two and six hundred dead, and became a turning point in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. Brink himself remarked afterward, "Looking on Darkness elicited much comment because it is one of the first Afrikaans novels to openly confront the apartheid system. This account of an illicit love between a 'Cape Coloured' man and a white woman evoked, on the one hand, one of the fiercest polemics in the history of that country's literature and contributed, on the other, to a groundswell of new awareness among white Afrikaners of the common humanity of all people regardless of color. In numerous letters from readers I was told that 'for the first time in my life I now realize that 'they' feel and think and react just like 'us." Far more significant in politically challenging racism, of course, was the activism of anti-apartheid activists like Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu, but Brink's role in making whites see as constructed a division many imagined to be simply natural was certainly not without importance.

"African Magic Realism" Brink's early career was spent producing work in Afrikaans. The banning of Look-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Although Brink introduced a kind of African magic realism to South African literature in a number of his novels, this style of writing had been used by other artists for many decades. Magic realism gained prominence when Gabriel García Márquez utilized it in his now-classic novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Here are some other examples of magic realism in literature and film:

The House of Spirits (1982), a novel by Isabel Allende. Told from the perspective of two protagonists, this novel incorporates elements of magic realism as it retells the history of four generations of a single family.

Big Fish (2003), a film directed by Tim Burton. In this film, Will Bloom tries to discover the truth about his father's life, somewhere amid all the exaggerated tales he's been told through the years.

Life of Pi (2001), a novel by Yann Martel. In this novel, young Piscine Molitar is stranded on a lifeboat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean with an orangutan and a tiger named Richard Parker.

ing on Darkness was a turning point that forced Brink to work also in English in order to maintain a readership; this, in turn, helped him focus on his subject: South African society, roots, and realities. It marked the beginning of a style Brink has referred to as "African Magic Realism." Magic realism is a style of writing that involves so-called magical elements in an otherwise realistic text. Brink uses the technique in order to blur the borders that separate life from death, reality from dreams, and fantasy from reality.

Brink's On the Contrary, for example, (1994) is the narrative of historical figure Etienne Barbier. The novel is presented as a single letter—comprising over three hundred sections interweaving fact and fantasy-that is written to a slave girl on the eve of Barbier's execution. The actual Barbier was a French adventurer in the Cape of Good Hope in the 1730s who led rebel Afrikaner colonists in their struggle with the corrupt administration of the East India Company, but the novel includes both mythical creatures and the voice of Jeanne-D'Arc (Joan of Arc). This magical, mythical strain continues in Imaginings of Sand (1999), a novel that explores a feminine perspective. Set against the background of the South African elections of 1994, the story is told through the eyes of Kristien Muller, a white South African woman who has returned from exile to be with her dying grandmother. The grandmother is a repository of stories of the South African past and promises her granddaughter, who has been away too long, "I'll give you back your memory." Critic Michael Kerrigan observes that this

"rambling roundabout skein of stories...comprises the true history of the Afrikaners."

Works in Critical Context

Brink is a prodigious, multitalented literary figure. In addition to plays, travel writing, and critical work, he has written sixteen novels and translated a great many works into Afrikaans. Despite three nominations for the Nobel Prize in Literature, Brink is disliked by many Afrikaans writers and critics in South Africa, not because of his outright moral opposition to apartheid, but for what is regarded as sentimentality and sensationalism in his writing. There is no doubt that Brink's writing is extremely uneven. Critics agree that his novels tend to be flawed in some respect or another, and Brink has a singular penchant for placing gauche and inane statements in the mouths of his characters; likewise, his rendition of sexual experience is often seen as cliché-ridden and tasteless. However he has written some of the most powerful stories to emerge in recent South African letters, and literary activism played a significant role in the struggle against apartheid.

Essays Brink's essays are recognized as important statements on literature and politics. Commenting on these, Joseph Skvorecky places Brink among the writers who have labored under oppressive censorship "with considerable technical skill and almost the elaborateness of a Henry James." J. M. Coetzee, with whom Brink has published an anthology called A Land Apart: A South African Reader (1986), sees in Brink an example of a writer who is "an organ developed by society to respond to its need for meaning," and one whose "focus is now not on the existential duty of the writer but on the strategy of battle."

Looking on Darkness and Other Novels The power of Brink's novels is recognized by most critics. C. J. Driver, speaking of Looking on Darkness, points out that this work is "linguistically exciting, continually perceptive about a society gone mad, fiercely angry about cruelty." Similarly, Frank Pike calls An Instant in the Wind "an ambitious work" that is "memorable by any standards, especially . . . in its evocation of the landscape." Rumours of Rain, Jim Hoagland affirms, "takes the reader inside the reality" of its subject and "captures the spreading terror of the white man trapped within the vast spaces of Africa and surrounded by equally vast numbers of Africans." Mel Watkins detects in A Dry White Season a vehicle for Brink "to better focus our attention on the ruthlessly dehumanizing apparatus of the apartheid system itself," while Jim Crace finds in The Wall of the Plague a novel that is "a courageous self-assessment" and "an interesting and pivotal work."

Along with these praises, however, are some recurring complaints. Brink is often accused of melodrama and sensationalism. In *Looking on Darkness*, Driver finds that,

at times, "imaginative credibility slips, the control of the narrating 'I' wavers and pity becomes self-pity." Roger Owen, in a review of *A Chain of Voices*, complains that despite the "awesomeness of the subject matter" there are serious flaws, among them "derivativeness; a proneness to cliché; a striving for 'fine' writing; a certain woodenness of style."

Responses to Literature

- Brink discusses apartheid practices in South Africa in relation to racism in the United States. Research the history of apartheid in South Africa—its causes and its manifestations. Then, in a short essay, compare apartheid in South Africa in the 1960s to present-day manifestations of racism in the United States.
- Read Looking on Darkness. Based on your reading of the text, why do you think the South African government banned the book?
- Magic realism is an important element in a number of Brink's works. Read several passages from *Imaginings of Sand*. Discuss how magic realism is (or is not) different from fantasy. Create a list of elements that define each genre to help clarify your discussion.
- 4. Watch the movie adaptation of *A Dry White Season*, then write a short essay comparing the film and the book. What does a medium like film allow the director to highlight or focus attention on? If you look at the film as an interpretation of the meaning of the novel, what key insights do you think director Euzhan Palcy makes?

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■ Joseph Brodsky

BORN: 1940, Leningrad, Soviet Union DIED: 1996, Brooklyn, New York

NATIONALITY: Russian

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

A Part of Speech (1980)

On Grief and Reason (1995)

So Forth (1996)

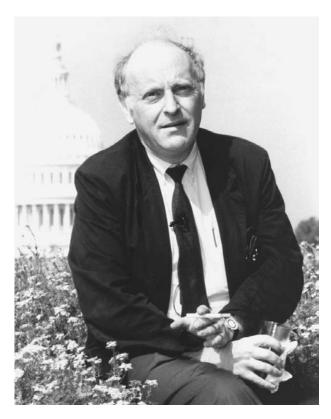
Collected Poems in English (2001)

Overview

Iosif Alexandrovich Brodsky was reviled and persecuted in his native Soviet Union, but the Western literary establishment lauded him as one of that country's finest poets. Brodsky aroused the ire of Soviet authorities as soon as he began publishing his ironic, witty, and independent verse—both under his own name, and under the slightly altered name of Joseph Brodsky. After spending five years in Arkhangelsk, an Arctic labor camp, and two different stays at mental institutions, Brodsky became the focus of a public outcry from American and European intellectuals over his treatment. In 1987 Brodsky received the Nobel Prize for Literature and in 1991 he was named poet laureate of the United States.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Exile in His Own Country Iosif Alexandrovich Brodsky was born on May 24, 1940, in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), Russia. As an infant, Brodsky lived through one of the most devastating episodes of World War II: the siege of Leningrad, during which Nazi German troops cut off all supplies to the city for over a year, resulting in the mass starvation of Russian citizens and over one and a half million deaths. In many ways, Brodsky lived as an exile before leaving his homeland. His father lost a position of rank in the Russian navy because he was Jewish; this left the family in poverty. Brodsky quit school and embarked on a self-directed education, reading literary classics and working a variety of unusual jobs. He learned English and Polish so that he would be able



Joseph Brodsky Brodsky, Joseph, 1991, photograph. AP Images.

to translate the poems of John Donne and Czeslaw Milosz. His own early poetry won the admiration of one of his country's leading literary figures, poet Anna Akhmatova.

Brodsky's poems were circulated by friends on type-written sheets and published in the underground journal *Sintaksis*. By 1963, he had become sufficiently well-known to serve as a target for a Leningrad newspaper, which denounced his work as pornographic and anti-Soviet. The following year, Brodsky was officially charged by a Soviet court as a "social parasite." In the Soviet Union, which supported the rights of workers as its most important ideal, all citizens were expected to contribute meaningfully and substantially to society. Many Soviets viewed artistic pursuits as a waste of resources unless the art was meant to glorify the citizens of the Soviet Union; government officials frequently used this rationale to persecute or imprison writers and artists who were critical of Soviet policies and actions.

Solomon Volkov, writing in his book *Conversations with Joseph Brodsky: A Poet's Journey through the Twentieth Century*, explained that Brodsky's "Kafkaesque trial occupies a central position in the Brodsky myth." Little did Leningrad officials suspect when they instigated this routine case that the individual they considered a Jewish "pygmy in corduroy trousers, scribbling poems that alternated gibberish with whining, pessimism, and pornography," would

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brodsky's famous contemporaries include:

Tobias Wolff (1945–): American fiction writer whose memoirs and novels overlap with Brodsky's in tone, theme, and content.

Valentina Tereshkova (1937–): A Soviet cosmonaut, Tereshkova was the first woman to fly in space.

Sirhan Sirhan (1944–): Palestinian who was convicted of assassinating American politician Robert F. Kennedy.

Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist who wrote *Things Fall Apart*, the most widely read African novel ever written, and received the Man Booker International Prize in 2007.

Nelson Mandela (1918–): Before his imprisonment as a terrorist and a Communist, Mandela actively opposed apartheid practices in South Africa. After spending twenty-seven years behind bars, Mandela was released then elected president of South Africa in 1994.

turn their Soviet court proceedings into an absurd drama at the intersection of genius and idiocy. When the female Soviet judge asked Brodsky, "Who made you a poet?" Brodsky thoughtfully replied, "And who made me a member of the human race?" and added hesitatingly, "I think it was God." Brodsky's friend, Lev Loseff, observed that in an instant Brodsky's answer took the proceedings to a different level. This notorious dialogue became one of the most frequently quoted court exchanges in the history of twentieth-century culture. The poet was sentenced to five years in a labor camp above the Arctic Circle.

Thanks to outside pressure from the literary community, after eighteen months Brodsky was released. Still, the poet was continually harassed. By 1972, when the visa office strongly "suggested" that he leave the country, Brodsky had been imprisoned three times and was twice committed to mental institutions. That year the poet was put on a plane for Vienna, an unwilling emigrant who left behind his parents and a son. Fortunately, Brodsky's exile was softened by the friendship of poet W. H. Auden and others. The position of poet-in-residence at the University of Michigan introduced Brodsky to American academic life, and Brodsky was soon publishing works in Russian and English.

Poet Laureate in America Brodsky became an American citizen in 1980, an indication that he had come to terms with permanent exile from his homeland. His new country also accepted Brodsky in an unprecedented manner. In 1991 he became the first foreign-born person to be named poet laureate of the United States—the

highest honor the country offers a poet. Brodsky used the position to promote the mass distribution of poetry, suggesting that books of poems be placed in hotel rooms and sold in drug stores. In 1993, he and Andrew Carroll founded the American Poetry & Literacy Project, an organization whose goal is to introduce poetry into everyday American life. Since its creation, the group has given away over one million books of poetry to schools, hospitals, subway and train stations, hospitals, jury waiting rooms, supermarkets, truck stops, day-care centers, airports, zoos, and other public places.

Works in Literary Context

Though one might expect Brodsky's poetry to be political in nature, this is not the case. His themes tend more toward the common themes of traditional poetry—love, nature, mankind, life, and death. Although the significance and worth of Joseph Brodsky's creative opus continues to be debated to this day, the fact that he challenged many preconceived political, aesthetic, and philosophical sensibilities of his time—in both his poetry and his prose works, in both English and Russian, and in his bearing while under prosecution as a "parasite"—is indisputable.

Poemy In 1962 Brodsky discovered the work of the English metaphysical poets, primarily Donne, whose poetry—full of wit, coolly passionate, philosophically detached, highly intellectual, exquisitely crafted with intricate conceits and geometric figures—galvanized the young man. Both in its themes and in its foreignness to the dominant Russian poetic tradition, Donne's work corresponded perfectly to the feelings of alienation that Brodsky had already discovered in himself.

In 1962 and 1963, under the influence of Donne as well as of Marina Tsvetaeva, whose powerful *poemy* (long narrative poems) he had recently discovered, Brodsky composed his own first *poemy*. This genre, distanced from the intimacy of the short lyric form, held the potential for the creation of a kind of "lyrico-philosophical" epic that remained attractive to Brodsky throughout the remainder of his creative life, becoming the hallmark of his poetic legacy. The characteristics of Brodsky's works in this genre are rhythmic and stanzaic inventiveness, extended complex metaphors, the mingling of wildly different linguistic registers, paradoxical thought patterns, a tight weaving together of intricate compositional and metaphysical strands, and an acidic sense of humor.

Time and Memory In the poems Brodsky wrote during his exile in the village of Norinskaia, he makes use of the compositional possibilities of the baroque—the juxtaposition of the grotesque and the serious, the ephemeral and the eternal, the coarse and the eloquent—while at the same time distancing himself from pure lyricism and adopting, instead, a profoundly intellectual worldview.

Exemplary of all these developments in Brodsky's poetics is his poignant elegy "Verses on the Death of T. S. Eliot," written after Eliot's death on January 4, 1965. In this poem Eliot's magi (from his poem "The Journey of the Magi," 1927) are replaced by the androgynous figures of two mythic maidens, England and America, the two nations where Eliot made his home. Time is an overwhelming presence, and in fact time itself—not death or God-claims the poet's life. Poetry, as Brodsky often wrote, is time reconfigured: "in the rhyme / of years the voice of poetry stands plain." Through the strength of his poetry Eliot has inscribed his being on the physical world. The living will remember him intimately through his poems "as the body holds in mind / the lost caress of lips and arms." Poetic language is the vessel of memory; Brodsky's own poetic signature is now developed to the point at which he, too, etches himself into the consciousness of his physical surroundings—he knows now his own poetic strength.

Influences Brodsky's poetry was influenced by his mentor and friend Anna Akhmatova; the English poet John Donne, for whom he wrote an elegy; and W. H. Auden, who wrote a foreword for Brodsky's Selected Poems, Joseph Brodsky (1977) prior to Auden's death in 1973. Brodsky's other personal literary antecedents included Virgil, Aleksandr Pushkin, Marina Tsvetaeva, Osip Mandelstam, Eugenio Montale, Constantine Cavafy, T. S. Eliot, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Lev Shestov, and Isaiah Berlin.

Works in Critical Context

Outside of the government of the Soviet Union, Brodsky's early "Romantic" work is virtually universally praised for its fervor, if not for its execution. As Brodsky continued to grow as a poet, he became increasingly more adept at matching tone and style to subject. His achievements were recognized when he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1987 and the position of poet laureate of the United States of America.

The Height of Brodsky's Success: The American Years The strength of Brodsky's poetic voice and vision is demonstrated in the hundreds of poems published in his major collections of the American years: End of the Belle Epoque (1977); Urania (1987); Notes of a Fern (1990); and View with a Flood (1996). Brodsky's refusal to relinquish either his command of the Russian language or his rightful position in the Russian poetic pantheon was not, however, the only factor that guaranteed his poetic survival in emigration. His adoption of the English language as his second mother tongue and of the United States as his second homeland undoubtedly played an important role in ensuring that he did not fade into nonexistence as Soviet authorities had hoped. Instead, Brodsky remained an imposing literary presence. Indeed, critical acclaim of his work was virtually universal

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Brodsky is not the first artist to have his work scrutinized by the government and, in fact, to have legal charges brought against him for the work. Artists often find it necessary to challenge conventional wisdom regarding politics, religion, sexuality, and an array of other controversial topics. Here are some of the works that provoked a strong negative response:

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), a novel by Oscar Wilde. When this book was released, it came under scrutiny for its homosexual themes. Wilde's character was called into question, and he eventually was convicted of "indecency" and served two years behind bars.

The Necessity of Atheism (1810), an essay by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley published this text while still a student at Oxford. He was immediately expelled from the university.

The Master and Margarita (1973), a novel by Mikhail Bulgakov. Bulgakov wrote his fantastical critique of Stalinist society in the 1930s, but due to government censorship, it could not be published until long after the author's death.

Ulysses (1922), a novel by James Joyce. When this book was published in 1922, it was immediately banned in both the United States and the United Kingdom for "obscenity." It is now considered one of the greatest literary achievements of the twentieth century.

during this period of Brodsky's life. However, when Brodsky began to work in English, critical opinion was divided.

Collected Poems in English Collected Poems in English, published posthumously, is a definitive collection of Brodsky's translated work and his original work in English. It is "dramatic and ironic, melancholy and blissful," reported Donna Seaman in Booklist. She claimed that this volume "will stand as one of the twentieth century's tours de force." Collected Poems in English is "a highly accomplished, deft, and entertaining book, with a talent for exploitation of the richness of language and with a deep core of sorrow," in the estimation of Judy Clarence in Library Journal. It captures Brodsky's trademark sense of "stepping aside and peering in bewilderment" at life, according to Sven Birkerts in the New York Review of Books. Birkerts concluded: "Brodsky charged at the world with full intensity and wrestled his perceptions into lines that fairly vibrate with what they are asked to hold. There is no voice, no vision, remotely like it."

Responses to Literature

1. Today, there are a number of Tibetan authors imprisoned by the Chinese government. Using the

Internet and the library, research one or two of these writers. In a short essay, compare their trials with Brodsky's. How dangerous do you think these writers are to their respective countries?

- 2. As poet laureate, Brodsky tried to make poetry common throughout the country. Why do you think Brodsky thought it was necessary to promote poetry? Do you think poetry is less popular now than it used to be?
- 3. Read Brodsky's *Nativity Poems*. In this collection of poems, Brodsky explores the meaning of the Christmas season, both on a personal and a social level. How accurate is his assessment of the importance and meaning of Christmas? In what ways is his interpretation accurate? In what ways is it lacking?
- 4. For more background on life in Russia during Stalin's regime, read *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (2007), by Orlando Figes. The book uses firsthand accounts to show just how tightly the government of the Soviet Union controlled families and individuals.

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Manne Brontë

BORN: 1820, Thornton, England DIED: 1849, Scarborough, England

NATIONALITY: English GENRE: Poetry, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Agnes Grey (1847)

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848)

"The Three Guides" (1848)

"Self-Communion" (1848)

"A dreadful darkness closes in" (1849)

Overview

Anne Brontë was one of the famous Brontë sisters, all well-known writers of the mid-Victorian era in England. While Anne Brontë remains the least known of the Brontë sisters, often referred to as the "other one" even by scholars, at the time of her death at age twenty-nine in 1849 she was actually more accomplished than her sisters Charlotte and Emily. Brontë not only published a volume of poetry with her sisters, but also saw several of her poems and two novels published independently. Considering that neither Emily nor Charlotte were as productive by their twenty-ninth year, many critics speculate that the youngest of the Brontë sisters might have been a major literary figure had she lived into her thirties.



Anne Brontë Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Anne Brontë was born in Thornton, in the English county of Yorkshire, on January 17, 1820. She was the sixth and youngest of Reverend Patrick and Maria Branwell Brontë's children, and spent most of her early life in the village of Haworth at her home at the parsonage. Her mother died in 1821, and Elizabeth, her "Aunt Branwell", joined the family and served as the household supervisor until her death in 1842. Perhaps to lessen the strain on Aunt Branwell and to help educate his daughters, Patrick Brontë decided to send his daughters away to get an education.

Tragedy at Cowan Bridge Anne was fortunate that as the youngest daughter she was unable to join her elder sisters, Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, and Emily at the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge, because it was there that an epidemic occurred in 1825 that took the lives of Maria and Elizabeth and forced Emily and Charlotte to return to Haworth. The harsh, cramped conditions at the school fostered the spread of tuberculosis, the disease that claimed Maria and Elizabeth and, ultimately, Anne herself, who likely contracted the disease from her sisters. Researchers estimate seven out of every ten people in England contracted tuberculosis in their lifetimes in the nineteenth century, before doctors understood how the disease was spread. Anne received some formal education between 1835 and 1837 at Margaret Wooler's boarding school at Roe Head and later, when Wooler's school was relocated, at Dewsbury Moor near Leeds.

Work as a Governess and Literary Productivity Anne served as a governess between 1839 and 1845, but the work proved too much of a strain for her. After resigning her post in June 1845, she returned to Haworth, where she would remain with her family until her death a few years later.

Anne Brontë's early years—both before and after her tenure as a governess—were extremely productive in a literary sense. Throughout her childhood, at least up until the time she left Haworth for Blake Hall, Brontë and her sister Emily collaborated on a series of imaginative adventures about the fictitious land known as Gondal. While none of their Gondal prose survives, much of the poetry from that period is still available. One of Brontë's earliest poems, dated July 1, 1837, is a Gondal poem titled "Alexander and Xenobia."

Romantic Infatuations Anne had a youthful enthusiasm for romance, evident in some of her poetry. This was apparently tested in 1839 when she developed an infatuation with her father's curate, the Reverend William Weightman. While the exact nature of their relationship has long been a point of debate, it seems beyond conjecture that Weightman was never a serious suitor. Despite the fact that their relationship never amounted to much,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brontë's famous contemporaries include:

Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888): American novelist best known for her book *Little Women*, she was also a seamstress, servant, teacher, and Civil War nurse before becoming an author.

Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906): American civil rights advocate and leader, she was instrumental in the securing of women's rights, including the 1919 right to vote.

William Booth (1829–1912): A British Methodist preacher, he founded the Salvation Army—originally a Christian coalition bearing no arms and now one of the largest humanitarian services in the world.

Louis Pasteur (1822–1895): French scientist famous for his breakthrough discoveries about the causes of disease. He is especially known for his work in the areas of germ theory and vaccine development.

many critics have noted that Weightman's death in September 1842 may have affected Anne deeply. Two of her poems—"To _____," written in the December following his death, and "Severed and Gone," written in 1847—ostensibly demonstrate Anne's mourning his loss.

Attempts at Success with Acton Bell In May 1846 a book of poetry by the Brontë sisters appeared under their pseudonyms as Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Acton was Anne's pen name. While the sisters considered publication of the book an accomplishment in itself, the collection, which was modestly priced and the beneficiary of several good reviews, had by June 1847 sold only two copies.

Yet even as sales of the collection failed to live up to expectations, the sisters turned to other literary endeavors. They each wrote a short novel and then searched for a publisher who would release Anne's Agnes Grey, Emily's Wuthering Heights, and Charlotte's The Professor as a three-volume set. After a series of rejections the quasi-reputable firm of Thomas Cautley Newby of London agreed to publish Agnes Grey and Wuthering Heights together if the sisters agreed to contribute fifty pounds to offset expenses. Despite the tough conditions of the offer and Newby's refusal of Charlotte's novel, Anne and Emily agreed to the terms, and Agnes Grey and Wuthering Heights were published in December 1847. While Agnes Grey was and still is overshadowed by its companion novel, it was nevertheless at the time warmly received. Agnes Grey, like Charlotte's later novel Jane Eyre is the story of a governess, forced into her profession by

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also been interested in themes of love and death:

As I Lay Dying (1930), a novel by William Faulkner. This novel tells the story of the aftermath of the death of Addie Bundren from the point of view of several different characters.

Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1981), a novel by Gabriel García Márquez. In a kind of journalist-detective style, the author tells the story of a murder and the efforts to solve it.

Romeo and Juliet (c. 1595), a play by William Shakespeare. In this classic tale of star-crossed teenagers, love is short-lived and death is inevitable.

Sula (1974), a novel by Toni Morrison. In this contemporary novel themes and characters are presented in an evocative structure of opposites.

financial necessity. Anne drew from her own experience as a governess in writing the novel.

Mixed Acclaim for Anne Brontë The reviews of Anne's second novel, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, however, were in some cases far from kind. Unlike Charlotte, who essentially gave up writing poetry after the publication of Jane Eyre in 1847, Anne did not let her interest in novel writing end her career as a poet. It was about this time, in fact, that she accomplished what her more famous sisters did not: she had one of her poems published independently in a magazine. Anne's poem "The Three Guides" was published in the August 1848 issue of Fraser's Magazine. Unfortunately, just as she seemed to be reaching maturity as a poet, tragedy and illness befell her family. On September 24, 1848, a little more than a month after the publication of "The Three Guides," Brontë's brother Branwell died. By October 9 Emily's health seemed in question as well. Refusing medical attention until her last day alive, she died of tuberculosis on December 19, 1848. Anne's health, which had been delicate even before Emily's death, began to fail rapidly. In January 1849 she wrote "A dreadful darkness closes in," a poem that seems not only to address Emily's recent death, but to anticipate her own. She did not long survive her beloved sister. Anne died of tuberculosis on May 28, 1850.

Works in Literary Context

Two other British poets, Robert Burns and John Milton, are said to have influenced Anne Brontë's writing. Further influence on her poetry was the loss of loved ones.

Her mother Maria Branwell Brontë died of cancer, and her two older sisters Maria and Elizabeth died of tuberculosis. Much has been written on the impact these deaths had on Brontë.

Gothic Tendencies Brontë's early poetry demonstrates a tendency toward emotional extremes, morbid preoccupation, and the supernatural common to Gothic literature. Gothic literature can be considered part of the Romantic movement in literature and the arts, which spanned the first half of the nineteenth century. The Romantic movement that sought to break with the cold rationalism and focus on science prevalent in the eighteenth century and focus instead on nature, emotion, beauty, and personal experience. One of Brontës Gothic-type poems was "A Voice from the Dungeon," written in October 1837 when Brontë was at Dewsbury Moor. This poem has a rather gruesome tone, as the narrator claims to "dream of fiends instead of men." The narrator, in a trancelike state, is awakened by "one long piercing shriek. / Alas! Alas! That cursed scream," which portends that she must "die alone." Indeed, the eerie nature of the verse is more emblematic of Emily's work than Anne's, and for some time this was considered to be Emily's poem despite the fact that Anne signed the manuscript. It is perhaps an indication of the extent to which Anne Brontë's reputation as a poet has been reclaimed that she is now justly given credit for this poem that, like much of Emily's work, is preoccupied with death.

"A Voice from the Dungeon" is rather atypical of Brontë's early poetry in some ways. But other poems written during this period have more consistent thematic connections. A Gondal poem titled "Alexander and Xenobia" contains stanzas depicting the reunion of two young lovers after a period of separation and demonstrates Brontë's teenage infatuation for romantic poetry. The tone of the poem is cheerful and optimistic although that outlook became less common in Brontë's poetry after she reached maturity and was beset by a variety of woes. "The Three Guides," for example, displays a more mature point of view, combining elements of religiosity and underlying morbidity found in much of her early work.

Works in Critical Context

Brontë's reputation as a novelist and poet was for many years somewhat squashed by her sister Charlotte's influence. Charlotte did not favor *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848)—the story of an abused woman who deserts her alcoholic and adulterous libertine husband. Charlotte disliked the subject matter to such an extent that she perhaps tried to compensate for it by stressing her sister's piety and quiet nature. These efforts to protect Brontë's reputation succeeded perhaps too well: literary historians have tended to assume that Brontë lacked the fire and

passion of her sisters, and that her success was almost entirely due to their fame. These efforts to protect her caused her to be seen somewhat as a writer of extremes.

"Self-Communion" (1848) Written after "The Three Guides," between November 1847 and April 1848, "Self-Communion" is the longest poem Brontë wrote as an adult, and it is also one of her best works. This poem, which most critics agree explores her relationship with her sister Emily, transcends much of her earlier poetry. For pure lyric beauty, it ranks among the best poetry composed by the Brontë sisters. As in most of her poetry, the presence of God is emphasized. Were this poem representative of the majority of her work, Brontë might rank as one of the greatest of Victorian women poets.

Anne's piety has often led critics to be dismissive about her work. Some critics have assumed from the prevalence of religious themes in her poetry that she was a bored country girl with little else to write about—although this assessment does belie the careful consideration with which Brontë pursued theological questions. Yet few critics have believed in her abilities as fervently as did George Moore, who claimed on the basis of her novels alone that had Brontë "lived ten years longer she would have taken a place beside Jane Austen, perhaps even a higher place."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Using your library and the Internet, find out who were the most popular writers of the mid-nineteenth century in England. Search for actual newspaper articles and other period documents. What were the critics of the time saying about the popular writings? What subject matter and themes were important to readers of the period? Are the writers who were most popular then still read today, or do modern readers and scholars prefer different writers from the period?
- 2. Why do you think Anne Brontë has enjoyed less fame than her sisters?
- 3. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about tuberculosis in the nineteenth century. How widespread was the disease? How was it diagnosed? How was it treated? Write a paper summarizing your findings.
- 4. Anne Brontë worked for years as a governess. To find out more about the lives of real nineteenth-century governesses, read *Governess: The Lives and Times of the Real Jane Eyres* (2008) by Ruth Brandon.

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図 Charlotte Brontë

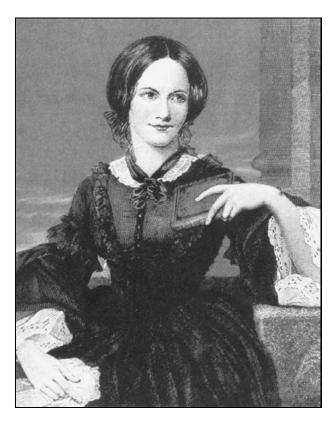
BORN: 1816, England
DIED: 1855, England
NATIONALITY: English
GENRE: Novels, poetry
MAJOR WORKS:

Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell (1846) Jane Eyre, An Autobiography (1847)

Shirley (1849) Villette (1853) The Professor (1857)

Overview

Charlotte Brontë was one of three famous sisters (Anne and Emily Brontë being the other two) who each contributed significantly to the literary landscape of the nineteenth century. Charlotte Brontë's reputation rests mostly on her 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*, a book that was a



Charlotte Brontë Bronte, Charlotte, photograph of an illustration. International Portrait Gallery.

public sensation in its own day and has scarcely diminished in popularity since. The book's enduring attraction to critics and readers alike has much to do with the ways its headstrong narrator, the heroine Jane Eyre, both satisfies and challenges the social and literary conventions of the Victorian era. In one sense, the book is a period piece about the narrow spheres of British governesses; in another sense, it foreshadows a brand of feminism that would not take shape for another one hundred years.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Charlotte Brontë was born on April 21, 1816, in the village of Thornton, West Riding, Yorkshire. Her father, Patrick Brontë, was the son of a respectable Irish farmer in County Down, Ireland. Charlotte's mother, Maria Branwell Brontë, died when her daughter was only five years old. She had given birth to six children in seven years: Maria (1813), Elizabeth (1815), Charlotte (1816), Patrick Branwell (1817), Emily (1818), and Anne (1820). She died of cancer at the age of thirty-eight. Though the loss of their mother certainly made a difference in the lives of all the Brontë children, the younger ones—Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne—seem not to have been seriously affected by her death. An otherwise remarkably observant child, Charlotte remembered

little of her mother; when, as an adult, she read letters that her mother had written to her father during their courtship, she wrote to a friend on February 16, 1850, "I wish she had lived and that I had known her."

Tragedy for the Brontë Sisters at Cowan Bridge School In 1824, when she was eight years old, Charlotte and her sister Emily joined their older sisters at the newly opened Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge in the parish of Tunstall. Living conditions at the school were harsh and difficult. Charlotte's later depiction of the bleak "Lowood School" in Jane Eyre was based on Cowan Bridge.

Charlotte found the rigors of boarding school life trying in the extreme. Food was badly prepared under unsanitary conditions and, as a consequence, outbreaks of typhus forced the withdrawal of many students, some of whom died. Maria developed tuberculosis while at Cowan Bridge and was harshly treated during her incapacitating illness, an incident Charlotte drew upon in portraying her character Helen Burns's martyrdom at the hands of Miss Scatcherd in Jane Eyre. Patrick Brontë was not informed of his eldest daughter's condition until February 1825, two months after Maria began to show symptoms; when he saw her, he immediately withdrew her from the school and she died at home in early May. Elizabeth, in the meantime, had also fallen ill. When the entire school was temporarily removed on doctor's orders to a healthier site by the sea, Elizabeth was escorted back to Haworth where she died two weeks after Charlotte and Emily were brought home by their father on June 1.

Isolation in Yorkshire a Spur to the Imagination Following the tragic experience at Cowan Bridge, Patrick Brontë tutored his four remaining children at home and provided them with music and art instruction from competent teachers. The relative isolation of the Brontë children in their Yorkshire home caused them to develop very strong attachments to each other. The weather in Yorkshire was often inhospitable, and the children, with no other playmates to divert them, relied on their imaginations to invent their own make-believe world called Gondal, about which they created many poems and stories. In 1829, Charlotte began writing poetry. Producing sixty-five poems and a satirical play about poetry writing in 1829–1830, the fourteen-year-old self-consciously attempted to define herself as a poet. The various poetic forms that Brontë experimented with during this time reflect her self-designed apprenticeship through imitation of earlier poets. For example, her many descriptions of natural landscapes are indebted to the eighteenth-century topographical poetry that had been developed by "nature poets" such as James Thomson and William Wordsworth.

Attempts at Poetry Interrupted by Schooling at Roe Head This spate of poetic production was interrupted in January 1831, when Brontë left Haworth for a second time, traveling twenty miles to become a student

at Roe Head School in Mirfield, near Dewsbury. Roe Head was a small school that usually enrolled only about seven boarding students at a time, all girls around the same age, and therefore was able to attend closely to the needs and abilities of individuals. Though she was homesick at first, in time she won the respect and affection of her peers and came to feel quite at home in her new school environment.

After her departure from Roe Head in May 1832, the rather uneventful round of life at Haworth, where she was in charge of her younger sisters' education, eventually led Brontë back to writing poetry. In December of 1836, she decided to try her hand at professional writing, with the hope of earning her living as a publishing poet. To this end she sought the advice of no less a figure than Robert Southey, then poet laureate of England, to whom she sent a selection of her poems. The discouraging response in his letter of March 12, 1837, has become infamous: "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life: & it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment & a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, & when you are you will be less eager for celebrity." Such was the prevailing opinion at the time about women's artistic abilities and women's proper place in society. It was widely believed that a woman's only "proper duties" were to be a wife and mother. An unmarried woman might find respectable work as a teacher or governess, but a woman seeking a professional career of any sort was seen as unnatural.

Despite Southey's discouragement, between January 1837 and July 1838 Brontë wrote more than sixty poems and verse fragments, including drafts of what were eventually to be some of her best poetical works. However, they remained fragmentary and defective; it was not until 1845 that she was able to revise them into poems she was willing to publish.

Broadened Horizons at a Belgian School Charlotte and Emily Brontë left England in February 1842 to enroll as the oldest students in a Belgian school run by Madame Claire Zoë Heger and her husband, Constantin. English and Protestant in a school of Roman Catholic Belgians, the Brontës were isolated from their younger peers by differences in language, culture, age, and faith, not to mention Emily's austere reserve and Charlotte's social timidity. However, both young women made considerable academic progress in Brussels and were praised for their success.

Although she apparently composed little new poetry in Brussels, Brontë did continue to transcribe revised versions of earlier poems into a copybook she had brought with her from Haworth, an indication that she may have been contemplating publishing them in the future. The letters she wrote to Constantin Heger from Haworth in 1844 reveal Brontë's increasing anxiety

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brontë's famous contemporaries include:

Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906): An American civil rights leader who played a prominent role in the abolitionist, temperance, and women's suffrage movements.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861): One of the most respected Victorian poets, she is best known for her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850).

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892): English poet laureate who relied heavily on natural imagery, revealing traces of Romanticism.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863): English novelist and journalist who wrote one of the first glowing reviews of *Jane Eyre*.

Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888): Alcott gained lasting fame for her 1868 novel *Little Women*.

about establishing herself in a fulfilling line of work. Always troubled by extreme nearsightedness, she experienced a temporary further weakening of her sight at this time, causing her to sink into depression.

Self-Published Poems with Pen Names Brontë suddenly recovered from this period of depression in the fall of 1845, when she stumbled upon a notebook of Emily's poems. She eagerly pressed her sister to publish her poems with a selection of her own verse, to which were added poems contributed by Anne. The sisters agreed to publish the poems under male pen names, probably in order to overcome the widespread prejudice against literature by women and the potential embarrassment their pursuit of a writing career might cause their family. Indeed, it was common practice for women writers (including such nineteenth-century favorites as Jane Austen, George Eliot, and George Sand) to publish either anonymously or under a male pen name. Charlotte Brontë energetically set about the task of finding a publisher for Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell (1846), which the small London firm of Aylott & Jones agreed to print at the authors' expense, a common practice for unknown writers. Despite Charlotte Brontë's excitement over her sisters' verse, she wrote almost no poetry after 1845 and was already attempting to secure a contract for her first novel, The Professor (1857), before the Poems had even appeared in print.

The Professor was rejected nine times before she received an encouraging reply from the firm of Smith, Elder, which declined to publish the book but asked to review any other novel she might be working on. Heartened by this request, Brontë finished Jane Eyre rapidly—in about two weeks—and had the satisfaction of seeing

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In Jane Eyre, the title character is saved thanks to love—she eventually leaves a life of drudgery and finds herself happily married to her previous employer, Edward Rochester. Though this kind of romance is difficult to find in the real world, its presence in literature has been a constant through the ages. Here are some other works where love and romance save the day.

Cinderella (1697), a fairy tale by Charles Perrault. Though there are many versions of the Cinderella fable, Perrault's was the first to introduce the glass slipper and the fairy godmother's pumpkin; thanks to these props, a forlorn chambermaid wins the hand of a handsome prince.

A Room with a View (1908), a novel by E.M. Forster. In this Edwardian novel, a young Englishwoman traveling in Italy falls in love with a man who seems "beneath her." She ignores the advice of her chaperon and happily elopes anyway.

The Sound of Music (1965), a film directed by Robert Wise. Via her musical abilities and endless cheer, a governess manages to win the hearts of the captain for whom she works and his children in this hit movie based on a musical.

the novel in print shortly thereafter. The book was immediately popular and "Currer Bell" quickly became known by the reading public.

After Jane Eyre, Marriage and Celebrity After the success of her novel, Brontë wrote no poetry except for three unfinished poems on the occasions of her sisters' deaths. Though greatly saddened by the deaths of her siblings, she continued to publish novels—Shirley in 1849, and Villette in 1853. Letting her identity become known, she achieved the literary celebrity that Southey had warned her to avoid and became acquainted with several important authors, including William Makepeace Thackeray. At the age of thirty-eight, Brontë married her father's curate, Arthur Bell Nichols, and died, possibly of either dehydration and malnutrition brought on by severe morning sickness (it was speculated that she was pregnant) or a serious infection of the digestive tract, on March 31, 1855. She is buried, along with the rest of her remarkable family (except for Anne, who died in the seaside town of Scarborough), in the Church of St. Michael and All Angels, immediately across from her parsonage home.

Works in Literary Context

The Rise of the Novel Although Charlotte Brontë started her career as a poet, it is as a novelist that she is

best remembered. Like her contemporary Elizabeth Barrett Browning, she experimented with the poetic forms that became the characteristic modes of the Victorian period—the long narrative poem and the dramatic monologue. Unlike Browning, Brontë gave up writing poetry at the beginning of her professional career, when she became identified in the public mind as the author of the popular novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). Brontë's decision to abandon poetry for novel writing illustrates the dramatic shift in literary tastes and the marketability of literary genres—from poetry to prose—that occurred in the 1830s and 1840s.

Brontë's remarkable success with Jane Eyre was in part attributable to the shift in literary tastes of the period. While the English literary landscape of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had been dominated by poets, the nineteenth century reading public demanded works with which they could more readily identify. Jane Eyre was such a work: a story of an ordinary person who experiences extraordinary things. However, if one agrees with Virginia Woolf's claim that Charlotte Brontë's novels are read "for her poetry," one might argue that Brontë never did entirely abandon her career as a poet. Adapting her creative impulses to the demands of the market, Brontë incorporated poetic features into the more viable form of the novel, and so became a successful literary professional in Victorian England.

Gothic Influence in a Bildungsroman Format Like her sister's novel Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre is heavily influenced by the Gothic horror novels that rose to popularity at the turn of the nineteenth century. The dark setting, the mysterious Mr. Rochester, and the strange goings-on in the attic of his home all play on the conventions of horror. At the same time, the novel follows the structure of a Bildungsroman, or novel of maturation, as the plot follows Jane's journey from youth into womanhood.

First-Person Narration The plot of Jane Eyre follows the progress of a poor orphan from humiliating dependence to happiness and wealth as an heiress and the wife of her former employer. Victorian readers were disturbed by the novel's suggestion that women need not always be passive or submissive, and by its treatment of love, which, by contemporary standards, seemed coarse and offensive. The importance of romantic love is an ancient theme in literature, but in Jane Eyre it was presented with a frankness and intensity new to English fiction. That intensity is made possible by Bronte's decision to tell the story in the first person, from Jane's point of view. Jane Eyre dominates her world; every action is filtered through the medium of her sensibility, every character lives only as an actor in the drama of her life. In one of the most famous lines in English literature, Brontë further intensifies the reader's experience of the novel's events by having her first-person narrator address the reader directly as she states the resolution of all her

struggles to come to terms with her relationship with Mr. Rochester: "Reader, I married him."

Works in Critical Context

While *Jane Eyre* was popularly received, the initial critical reception of the novel varied. Several commentators admired the power and freshness of Brontë's prose; others, however, termed the novel superficial and vulgar. Perhaps the best-known early review, by Elizabeth Rigby, flatly condemned Jane Eyre as "an anti-Christian composition." Still other critics questioned the authorship of the novel. Some doubted that a woman was capable of writing such a work, while a critic in the *North American Review* contended that a man and a woman were its coauthors. In another early assessment, George Eliot expressed her admiration for the novel but complained that Brontë's characters spoke like "the heroes and heroines of police reports."

Although most critics have praised Brontë's narrative technique, some have argued that the story of *Jane Eyre* is unrealistic. Many commentators have lauded the novel's powerful language and have explored the work's unity, which they attribute to the use of the heroine as narrator as well as to Jane's process of spiritual growth.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Some readers of *Jane Eyre* wonder about the first Mrs. Rochester and her somewhat cruel treatment by Mr. Rochester. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is a "prequel" to *Jane Eyre* that imagines the early life of Edward Rochester's first wife.
- 2. Read a poem of Emily Brontë's and one of Charlotte's. Do you, like most critics, find Emily's poetics to be stronger? Why or why not?
- 3. Look at Edward Rochester and then at Heathcliff from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Do the two men have any traits in common? Would men like Mr. Rochester and Heathcliff be popular in today's world?

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Emily Brontë

BORN: 1818, Yorkshire, England DIED: 1848, Yorkshire, England

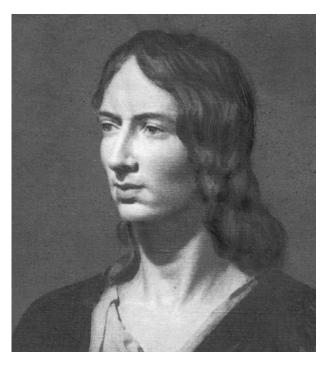
NATIONALITY: British GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Wuthering Heights (1847)

Overview

Emily Brontë is considered one of the most important yet elusive figures in nineteenth-century English literature. Although she led a brief and sheltered life, she left behind some of the most passionate and inspired writing in Victorian literature. Today, her reputation rests primarily



Emily Brontë Bronte, Emily, 1846, photograph. Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brontë's famous contemporaries include:

John Quincy Adams (1767–1848): Sixth president of the United States; established the Monroe Doctrine, stating that foreign governments were not allowed to interfere with U.S. affairs and that America in turn would stay neutral toward Europe, as long as no military actions were taken in the Americas.

George, Lord Byron (1788–1824): English Romantic poet with a famously scandalous life; his 1812–1816 poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* established the Byronic hero as romantic and tortured.

Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850): French novelist and playwright, considered one of the creators of realism in French literature; his characters are multidimensional and complex, rather than simply good or bad.

Mary Shelley (1797–1851): British writer, married to Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley; her best-known work is the 1818 novel *Frankenstein*.

Nat Turner (1800–1831): American slave, who led a bloody rebellion in Virginia against white Southerners before being caught and hanged; in the aftermath, Virginia debated abolishing slavery but narrowly decided to continue it.

on her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*, which has attracted generations of readers and critics and is a literary classic.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Tragedies Emily Jane Brontë was born on July 30, 1818, at the parsonage at Thorton in Yorkshire, England, the fifth child and fourth daughter of the Reverend Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell Brontë. She was raised by her father and maternal aunt at his new parsonage in Haworth following her mother's death in 1821. In 1825, she was sent to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, but she returned home when her sisters Maria and Elizabeth became ill at the institution and died.

Literary Life at Haworth In 1826, Patrick Brontë bought a set of wooden toy soldiers for his children, which opened up a rich fantasy world for Emily and her siblings Charlotte, Branwell, and Anne. Emily and Anne later invented a romantic legend centered upon the imaginary Pacific Ocean island of Gondal. The realm of Gondal became a lifelong interest for Brontë and, according to many scholars, was a major imaginative source for her writings. Beginning in 1826, Brontë also began making

drawings and sketches of natural subjects such as birds to which she was drawn for the remainder of her life. Her close observations of birds, animals, plants, and the changing skies over Haworth formed a significant part of the poetry she began writing at an early age.

Although Brontë was intellectually precocious, she also was painfully shy. She briefly attended a school in East Yorkshire in 1835 and worked as an assistant teacher at a school around 1838, but living away from home was too difficult for her. She returned home, writing poetry and attending to household duties until 1842, when she and Charlotte, hoping to acquire the language skills needed to establish a school of their own, took positions at a school in Brussels. There were limited career opportunities for British women of this time period, with teaching being one of the few options. The death of Brontë's aunt later that year, however, forced Brontë to return to Haworth again, where she lived for the rest of her life.

Brontë's Poetry In 1845, Charlotte discovered one of Emily's private poetry notebooks. At Charlotte's urging, Emily reluctantly agreed to publish some of her poems in a volume that also included writings by her sisters. Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, reflecting the pseudonyms adopted by Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, was published in May 1846. While only two copies of the book were sold, at least one commentator, Sydney Dobell, praised Emily's poems, singling her out in the Athenaeum as a promising writer and the best poet among the "Bell" family.

Her poetry is difficult to evaluate and interpret, as it was not written for publication, though she did revise much of her early work in 1844. Some of what has been preserved can be discounted as immature early drafts. Much of it deals with the fantasy world of Gondal, which is a barrier to the proper appreciation of the poetry.

Completed Only Novel Wuthering Heights Brontë had been working on Wuthering Heights (1847), which was published under the pseudonym Ellis Bell in an edition that also included Anne's first novel, Agnes Grey. Brontë's masterpiece was poorly received by contemporary critics who, repelled by the vivid portrayal of malice and brutality in the book, objected to the "degrading" nature of her subject. In the nineteenth century, as women began writing and publishing more fiction, critics often gave negative assessments of their works based solely on the author's gender. Such critics believed women lacked the worldly experience, critical judgment, and rationality to write works of value despite a rapid rise in works written by women and for an expanding female audience.

Brontë worked on revising her poetry after publishing *Wuthering Heights*, but her efforts were soon interrupted. Her brother Branwell died in September 1848, and Emily's own health began to decline shortly afterward. She was suffering from tuberculosis, an airborne infectious disease that attacks the lungs. The slow-killing

disease was common in the nineteenth century, especially in England and the United States, because of close quarters often created by intense industrialization and urbanization. In accordance with what Charlotte described as her sister's strong-willed and inflexible nature, Brontë apparently refused medical attention and died of the disease on December 19, 1848, at the age of thirty.

Works in Literary Context

In her writings, Brontë's exploration of the self, the imagination, and the visionary associate her more closely with Romantic poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth than with Victorian writers such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning. She was a serious poet, who, like her peer Emily Dickinson, wrote dozens of poems with no intention of publishing or even showing them to her family.

Antiromance Many of Brontë's Gondal poems as well as her novel are viewed as being antiromantic. Unlike the Romantic poets William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Lord Bryon, Brontë's idea of love does not enforce eternity but ruthlessly refuses it. In Wuthering Heights, the setting is cold, dreary, and barren, and the protagonist Heathcliff is curiously mean and calculating, unlike John Milton's Satan in Paradise Lost or the heroes of Lord Byron's works.

Critic Helen Brown was one of the first to point out the influence of George Gordon, Lord Byron, on Brontë's Gondal characters and their isolation, passions, dark crimes, and darker thoughts. The influence of Sir Walter Scott and Percy Bysshe Shelley on Brontë's poetry is also clear.

Works in Critical Context

Even though Brontë is more distinguished as a novelist than as a poet, scholars regard her poetry as a significant part of her work. Critical assessment of Brontë is divided over the question of whether to assess her poems separately from the Gondal mythology or to retain the Gondal context in order to clarify obscure references and provide dramatic and thematic unity. While *Wuthering Heights* was met with general perplexity upon its original publication, by the early twentieth century Brontë was hailed as one of the most important women novelists of the nineteenth century. The novel was considered one of the most powerful and original works in Victorian literature, incorporating elements of the Gothic novel, the Romantic novel, and the social criticism found in a Victorian novel.

Importance of Poetry In particular, lacking firsthand information concerning Brontë's life and opinions, commentators have looked to the poems as a source of insight into Brontë's personality, philosophy, and imagination. Critics have attempted to reconstruct a coherent Gondal "epic" from Brontë's poems and journal entries. In addition, critics have consequently noted many similarities

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Though *Wuthering Heights* is a story about love and passion, the theme of revenge is equally important, as Heathcliff returns to carry out a vengeful plan. Here are some other classic works that include the theme of revenge:

Elektra (c. 425 B.C.E.), a play by Sophocles. This play focuses on an extreme example of family misfortune. Electra convinces her brother Orestes to avenge their father's murder by killing their mother, Clytemnestra.

The Count of Monte Cristo (1844), a novel by Alexandre Dumas. The novel is a romantic tale of power, adventure, and revenge, as its protagonist, Edmond Dantès, seeks justice against those who betrayed him.

"The Cask of Amontillado" (1946), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. This well-known short story features a protagonist who is verbally insulted and avenges his honor by killing a man in a macabre way.

Hamlet (1601 or 1602), a play by William Shakespeare. In this revenge play, the readers wait for Hamlet to gather enough evidence before he avenges his father's murder.

between the passionate characters and violent motifs of Gondal and *Wuthering Heights*, and today, a generous body of criticism exists supporting the contention that the Gondal poems served as a creative forerunner of the novel

Wuthering Heights Initially, critics failed to appreciate Emily Brontë's literary significance. While commentators acknowledged the emotional power of Wuthering Heights, they also rejected the malignant and coarse side of life that it depicted. Charlotte Brontë responded to this latter objection in 1850, defending the rough language and manners in her sister's novel as realistic, but apologizing for the dark vision of life in the book, which she attributed to Emily's reclusive habits.

This focus on Brontë's aloofness, combined with the mystical aspects of her poetry and the supernatural overtones of *Wuthering Heights*, created an image of the writer as a reclusive mystic that dominated Brontë criticism into the twentieth century. Writing about the novel in 1900, William Dean Howells of *Harper's Bazaar* saw slightly more to the work, commenting that Brontë "bequeathed the world at her early death a single book of as singular power as any in fiction; and proved herself, in spite of its defective technique a great artist, of as realistic motive and ideal as any who have followed her."

Charles Percy Sanger's 1926 monograph was one of the first modern studies to bring Brontë's craftsmanship to light. As a result, scholars discovered the sophistication and complexity of her images, characterizations, themes, and techniques in *Wuthering Heights*. Psychological aspects also gained attention in the late twentieth century as Brontë continued to be regarded as an influential novelist.

Responses to Literature

- 1. After reading *Wuthering Heights*, hold a discussion about Heathcliff and his actions. How does his social class influence his actions?
- 2. Little is known about Emily Brontë's life, and some scholars try to get hints from her poetry. Read several of Brontë's poems and discuss what you think the poems reveal about her.
- 3. Create a chart that lists examples of both Romantic and Gothic elements in *Wuthering Heights*.
- 4. Using the Internet and/or your library's resources, conduct research on Emily's sisters Charlotte and Anne. Review their main works and compare them with Emily's *Wuthering Heights*.
- 5. Emily Brontë created an imaginary world—the island of Gondal—a world she used in her writing. With a partner, create an original story about Gondal. Who lives there? What do they do? What does the island look like?

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B Rupert Brooke

BORN: 1887, Rugby, England

DIED: 1915, off the island of Scyros, Greece

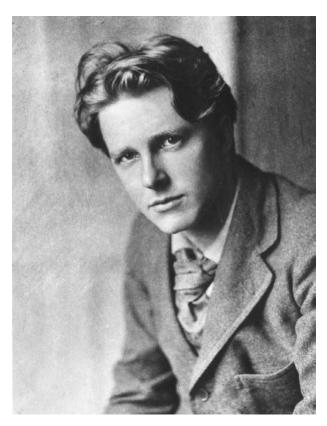
NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:
The Pyramids (1904)
The Bastille (1905)
Poems (1911)
1914, and Other Poems (1915)
Letters from America (1916)

Overview

At the time of his death at the age of twenty-eight, Rupert Brooke was considered to be England's foremost young poet. As an uncommonly handsome young man, Brooke came to represent the "doomed youth" of the generation that was killed in World War I. His sonnets



Rupert Brooke Sherril Schell / Hulton Archive / Getty Images

about the war, written in Antwerp, where Brooke first saw battle, were published in December 1914 and made him famous almost overnight. These sonnets, the high point of Brooke's brief poetic career, came to be an enormous source of inspiration and patriotism for those in the muddy trenches and those back home. Other contemporary poets such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Isaac Rosenberg lived long enough to take a more realistic and cynical view of war, but Brooke was always (as Winston Churchill described him) "joyous, fearless, versatile, deeply instructed, with classic symmetry of mind and body, ruled by high, undoubting purpose... all that one could wish England's noblest sons to be."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Gifted Youth Rupert Brooke was born on August 3, 1887, in Rugby, England, one of three brothers who would all die young. Good-looking from infancy, he was a fine athlete, good at soccer, cricket, tennis, and swimming, as well as intellectual pursuits. Brooke began writing poetry at the age of nine. By his teens he was writing in earnest.

Brooke's student years at King's College, Cambridge, were full of creative experimentation with politics, sexuality, and poetry. He became the president of the Fabian Society, a student group promoting socialist politics. Brooke was bisexual, and he was surrounded by both male and female friends who were in love with him. One of these was James Strachey, the younger brother of Lytton Strachey, who was close friends with writer Virginia Woolf and others in the intensely intellectual and sexually liberated set known as the "Bloomsbury Group." Brooke eventually tired of the Bloomsbury crowd and set off on an ambitious series of world travels.

He went to Italy twice in his late teens, to Germany in his twenties, and he traveled across the United States and Canada in 1912 writing pieces for the liberal London newspaper the *Westminster Gazette*. From San Francisco he set sail for the South Sea islands—Hawaii, Samoa, Fiji, and Tahiti.

Death in World War I Brooke joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve in August 1914, the first year of World War I. Beginning with the assassination of Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, the countries of Europe aligned with Germany on one side and the Allied Powers—France, Russia, and the United Kingdom—on the other in an attempt to establish control over the region. World War I was the first conflict that saw widespread use of armored tanks and chemical warfare, which left many survivors permanently disabled or disfigured. Although Brooke himself never engaged in combat, nearly ten million soldiers were killed

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brooke's famous contemporaries include:

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936): A British author born in Bombay who wrote in almost every genre—poetry, journalism, fiction, essays, and children's stories.

Lytton Strachey (1880–1932): A London-born biographer and essayist who was a prominent member of the Bloomsbury Group, which advocated intellectual ambition and sexual tolerance. He wrote for many periodicals and contributed several innovative biographical studies, including the influential anthology *Eminent Victorians* (1918).

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): This Irish poet and playwright set the agenda for modernist poetry throughout his long career. Like the painter Picasso, Yeats went through several experimental styles, each deeply marked by his strength of personality, political convictions, and formidable artistic technique.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939): An Austrian psychiatrist whose influence reached far beyond the practice of medicine. His theories of the powerful conflicting forces that exist in the subconscious mind affected all of the arts, helping to establish modernism as the exploration of the fragmentation of the individual mind that can hardly begin to fully understand itself.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1863–1914): Heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Austria had taken control of the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, a deeply unpopular move among the Serbians, who wanted these territories to be part of a Serbian state, not the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A Serbian terrorist assassinated Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, setting into motion a chain of events that would quickly escalate into World War I.

during the war, with another ten million civilians suffering the same fate.

After service in Belgium, Brooke was destined for the famous Gallipoli Campaign in February 1915, a joint operation with the French to capture the Turkish capital of Istanbul. Brooke did not die from wounds suffered during one of the largest battles of World War I, however; he died from a tiny insect bite on his lip. Fatal blood poisoning set in, and because the British Navy had orders to move on with their campaign, he was hastily buried in a grove of olive trees on the Greek island of Scyros. He was twenty-seven years old. All of England mourned his death, thinking of the lines in his most famous poem, "The Soldier": "If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is forever England."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the themes in Brooke's poetry is a sentimental view of the English countryside and small-town life, informed by his idyllic years as a student in Rugby and Cambridge. There is a tradition in British poetry of such sentimental and nostalgic poems, dating from the eighteenth century to the present day. Here are some more works that reflect these themes:

"Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" (1742), a

poem by Thomas Gray. In this poem the poet looks over the rolling hills at the site of his former school, pondering his past life and approaching demise.

Lyrical Ballads (1798), a collection of poems by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The straightforward poems in this collection turned the page to an entirely new era of Romanticism in English poetry.

Moortown (1979), a collection of poems by Ted Hughes. These poems portray life in the English countryside in a realistic but still idealized way, showing how the virtues of hard work on the farm and simple human decency

can put mankind in harmony with the rhythms of

Works in Literary Context

nature

Brooke's early models were the so-called "decadent" writers: Charles Baudelaire, Algernon Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater, and others. The "decadents" often wrote about morbid or perverse topics with an excess of self-expression and moodiness, emphasizing the importance of pure art for art's sake. While their works may seem dated or exaggerated now, they were nevertheless important for making the transition away from the moralistic realism that dominated the nineteenth century and into the artistic experimentation and new subjective perspectives of twentieth-century modernism.

Poetic Experimentation The poems Brooke wrote between 1905 and 1908 reflect this transitional period. Poems such as "Sleeping Out: Full Moon," "Ante Aram," and "The Call" are filled with abstractions, heavy imagery, antique spellings of words, and imperfect rhythms—they are written to sound like what young Brooke thought poems should be, rather than poems written in his own unique voice.

Similarly, Brooke's college-era love poetry is often beautiful but abstract and impersonal, heavily influenced by the idealism of the Romantic poets Percy Shelley and John Keats. William Butler Yeats, the dominant poet of the day, met Brooke and advised him to leave behind the empty abstractions and replace them with a more robust sensuality that would come to be more typical of modernist literature (as evidenced in the poetry of Yeats and the novels of James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence). Brooke was slow to take the hint, however, and instead became one of the leaders in a small John Donne revival in 1912. Donne (1572–1631), a great poet of both sensual and spiritual matters writing around the time of William Shakespeare, was a "metaphysical" poet who fused the abstract and concrete, soul and body. Brooke attempted to do the same, but again he had not yet found his own poetic voice.

Nationalism It is perhaps not surprising that Brooke wrote his most famous poems about his nostalgic love for England and praise of its countryside only when he was far away from home. Brooke's travels to the South Sea islands seemed to set him free from the expectations other people had of him and the assumptions they made based upon his appearance. Brooke soon became associated with the "Georgians," a group of poets writing around the time King George V came to the throne in 1910, who wrote sentimental poetry about rustic life and nature in the manner of William Wordsworth (1770–1850).

War Brooke's best-remembered poems are the sonnets he wrote about war. These were collected in 1914, and Other Poems, published in 1915, after his death. Brooke's war sonnets perfectly captured the mood of the moment. Unlike such later war poets as Wilfred Owen (1893–1918) and Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967), who would live long enough to see more of the horrors of war, Brooke wrote of the service to country and noble causes with a spirit of brave optimism. His war poetry may seem hopelessly idealistic to more cynical readers today, but at the time it provided genuine consolation and encouragement to weary soldiers homesick for a safe, supportive, and unchanging England.

Works in Critical Context

Only one collection of Brooke's poetry was published in his lifetime: *Poems* (1911), which contains fifty poems. After his death, *1914*, *and Other Poems* was published; it includes thirty-two more poems written between 1911 and 1914, including the immensely popular war sonnets.

The War Sonnets When Brooke died, he was hailed as a hero, even though he had seen little or no actual combat. Winston Churchill himself gave him a very eloquent eulogy. As Edward A. McCourt later wrote in his survey for the Dalhousie Review, "The popularity of the 1914 sequence is accounted for by the fact that through it Brooke expressed perfectly the mood of the moment. "As the war dragged on and death tolls climbed higher and higher, however, what used to seem idealistic in Brooke's poetry started to look more like foolishness to many people. The more cynical and intense poetry of Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, and Siegfried Sassoon captured the violence and ultimate futility of the war, and their

poetry became elevated over Brooke's as greater literary achievements toward the end of World War I and throughout World War II.

Critical Backlash By the 1940s there was a backlash against Brooke. Readers who had grown up with two wars, a great economic depression, and rapid urbanization found little they could relate to in Brooke's poetry, and literary critics were declaring him massively overrated. It was all too easy to find evidence for this in the clumsy poetic technique of some of his early verse. Likewise, some critics found issue with his final writings. In his 1974 book Rupert Brooke: The Man and the Poet, Robert Brainard Pearsall states: "The question of what Brooke might have accomplished if he had lived a few more decades had almost been answered by the time of his death. I judge that his slight talent had not only peaked, but moved along in its downward curve."

Myth and Reality From the 1970s until today, critical attention on Brooke is often focused on efforts to separate the Rupert Brooke "myth" from reality. Recently, Brooke's poetry has been given energetic re-readings in light of new biographical perspectives. While Brooke has had a rough time with professional literary critics from the 1940s onward, his reputation has always been, and continues to be, secure with general readers. His poetry often shares a shelf with poets such as Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg—sensitive, easy-to-understand poets of nature and human conflict who appeal to people who read their poetry for pleasure and insight.

Responses to Literature

- 1. To what extent should a poet's work be separated from his or her life? Should the "legend" of a poet's life be relevant to what they wrote?
- 2. Why do you think some of Brooke's best writing about England happened when he was in a place that could hardly be more different—the South Sea islands of Hawaii and Tahiti? What did Brooke find so appealing about these places?
- 3. Read some of Brooke's early poetry. What are your own opinions about its quality? Have the critics been unfair, do you think, to the poetry Brooke wrote when he was just a teenager? Write your own assessment of one of his poems.
- 4. Using your library and the Internet, research the poetry that is being written by soldiers fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq today. Can you make any generalizations about the style and perspective they are using? How does it compare with the poetry written by soldiers from World War I and World War II? What has changed, and what has remained the same, about war poetry?

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Marita Brookner

BORN: 1928, London, England
NATIONALITY: British
GENRE: Nonfiction, fiction
MAJOR WORKS:
Watteau (1968)
The Debut (1981)
Hotel du Lac (1984)
Family and Friends (1985)
Altered States (1997)

Overview

Anita Brookner began writing novels at the age of fifty-three after establishing herself as a respected art historian. Since then, she has been a prolific writer, averaging a book a year. Although some critics have noted her tendency to return to the same themes time and again, Brookner has garnered significant critical praise for her novels, winning the prestigious Booker Prize in 1984.



Anita Brookner Brookner, Anita, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in Suburban London Brookner was the only child of middle-class, socialist, nonreligious Jewish parents. She was born and grew up in Herne Hill, an upscale suburb of south London. Her birth date is July 16, 1928, although when she started to write she deducted ten years from her age until a friend pointed out the discrepancy in the London Times. Brookner's mother, Maude Schiska, was a professional singer who gave up her career to marry Brookner's father, Newson Bruckner. Brookner remembers her childhood as both crowded and lonely. Living in a suburban villa with her grandmother, parents, bachelor uncle, and many servants, she remembers her parents as silent and unhappy. In the 1930s and during World War II, the household was also filled with Jewish refugees who had fled Nazi Germany's persecution and imprisonment of Jews. During the war, the Nazis killed roughly 6 million Jews through exposure to the cold, starvation, and execution. The tragic situation of Jews in Europe permeated Brookner's childhood and adolescence.

Early on, Brookner showed great academic promise. After attending a local primary school and James Allen's Girls' School in Dulwich, she studied history as an undergraduate at King's College, London, and then completed a doctorate in art history at the distinguished Courtauld Institute of Art in London, where its director, the magisterial art historian and spy, Anthony Blunt, both encouraged her as her teacher and used her as an unknowing stooge in his covert operations (a fact of which Brookner was not aware until the publication of Peter Wright's book *Spycatcher* in 1987).

Art and the Turn Toward Fiction After studying the art of Jean-Baptiste Greuze in Paris on a French government scholarship, Brookner was launched on her first distinguished career as an art historian. Brookner's area of specialization is late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century French art, and her books on the subject are not only respected but composed with the kind of narrative drive that in retrospect merges seamlessly with her talent as a novelist.

By 1980, Brookner had earned considerable recognition as an art historian, but she turned to fiction as a form of escape. In a 1989 interview with Olga Kenyon, Brookner summed up her life and the mental state that turned her toward fiction at the age of fifty-three. "Mine was a dreary Victorian story: I nursed my parents till they died. I write out of a sense of powerlessness and injustice, because I felt invisible and passive."

A Prodigious Output Brookner wrote her first novel, A Start in Life (published in the United States as The Debut), during her summer vacation. "It was most undramatic," she told Amanda Smith in 1985.

Nothing seemed to be happening and I could have got very sorry for myself and miserable...and I'd always got such nourishment from fiction. I wondered—it just occurred to me to see whether I could do it. I didn't think I could. I just wrote a page, the first page, and nobody seemed to think it was wrong....So I wrote another page, and another, and at the end of the summer I had a story. That's all I wanted to do—tell a story.

The influential editor Liz Calder accepted the novel for Jonathan Cape.

A Start in Life was followed by two more novels in 1982 and 1983, establishing Brookner's reputation for insightful and stylistic prose. This reputation was cemented by her fourth book, Hotel du Lac, which won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1984. Not one to rest on her laurels, Brookner has continued to publish roughly a novel a year for over twenty-five years.

Despite her success in two highly public careers, Brookner's has been a quiet, fastidious life. She is not part of the social scene of literary London. For many years she has lived in the same small apartment in Chelsea in London, and her needs have been simple: no word processor, answering machine, microwave, cellular telephone, or car.

Works in Literary Context

With the appearance of her first novel in 1981, Anita Brookner immediately secured a reputation as one of the finest stylists among contemporary writers of fiction in Britain. After a late start as a novelist, Brookner has proved to be a prolific source of the morally engaged novel of consciousness and of exquisite sensibility. Equally admired and criticized for her attention to the themes of stoicism, loneliness, and melancholy, which beset her contemporary, genteel characters, Brookner's voice is instantly recognizable as the most recent contributor to a tradition of distinguished British female writers that includes Jane Austen, Elizabeth Bowen, Rosamond Lehmann, Elizabeth Taylor, and Barbara Pym.

Brookner's work both borrows from and differs from that of the writers she admires. Like Charles Dickens (and despite the limitations of her range), she is a chronicler of London life. Like Henry James, she is an intense moralist, examining the dilemmas of the upper class. Like Marcel Proust, she has a deep interest in psychological obsession and the failure of desire. Brookner has a compelling interest in the individual and the family, in romance, and in the ways that art structures expectations. She also writes in a thoughtful and sometimes combative dialogue, using the cruder versions of the feminism of her day, with the topic of the life of the solitary, independent, intelligent woman being one of the hallmarks of her fiction.

Autobiography While Brookner's novels have varied in plot and subject, many critics have pointed out that much of her fiction is autobiographical to some extent. Her heroines, such as Dr. Ruth Weiss from A Start in Life or Kitty Maule from Providence, are intelligent, solitary women who must make sense of the connections, and lack of connections, with the people around them. Themes of loneliness, cultural and social isolation, and complex moral dilemmas—issues with which Brookner herself has had to deal—permeate her work.

Works in Critical Context

Acknowledged as one of the most successful prose stylists of twentieth-century British fiction, Anita Brookner has attracted both the rabid devotion and critical scrutiny of a major author. She established a reputation for consistent and insightful fiction with her first three novels and then won the Booker Prize for fiction in 1984 for *Hotel du Lac*.

Hotel du Lac John Gross of the New York Times, who considers Brookner "one of the finest novelists of her generation," calls Hotel du Lac "a novel about romance, and reality, and the gap between them and the way the need for romance persists in the full knowledge of that gap." What distinguishes this novel from Brookner's previous novels, says Anne Tyler in the Washington Post Book World, is that in Hotel du Lac, "the heroine is more

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brookner's famous contemporaries include:

Nora Ephron (1941–): American film director, producer, screenwriter, and novelist best known for her romantic comedies. She is a triple nominee for the Academy Award for Original Screenplay.

Anne Tyler (1941–): American novelist best known for winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1989 for her novel *Breathing Lessons*. Tyler was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 1986 and National Book Critics Circle Award winner in 1985.

Charles, Prince of Wales (1948–): The eldest son of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, Charles is heir apparent to the thrones of sixteen sovereign states known as the Commonwealth realms. He was married to Diana of Wales from 1981 to 1996.

Iris Murdoch (1919–1999): Irish novelist and Booker Prize winner known for such novels as *Under the Net* (1954). Chinua Achebe (1930–): Nigerian novelist and poet most famous for his first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

philosophical from the outset, more self-reliant, more conscious that a solitary life is not, after all, an unmitigated tragedy."

With the award of the Booker Prize for *Hotel du Lac*, Brookner received accolades that assured her of a place among the ranks of the best contemporary writers of British fiction. Many critics and readers regard it as Brookner's best novel to date. However, along with a greater readership, the novel also crystallized criticism of Brookner's writing, as she was now seen as an important enough writer to attack. For example, Adam Mars-Jones, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, stresses the "masochism" of Brookner's view of romance and comments that "*Hotel du Lac* works so hard at the limpness of its heroine that it has a perversely bracing effect." The novel, in his view, "is divided between narcissism and self-mortification, between wallowing and astringency."

From this time onward, the annual publication of one of Brookner's novels automatically attracted reviews, commentary, and interviews. Noting, too, her interest in the topic of humiliation and failure, she said that in England her books were criticized for being depressing. She attributed this to her "semi-outsider" position in England and her affinity with French life. While some critics fault the lack of thematic variety in her works, many regard Brookner's elegant prose and detailed descriptions of place, her use of literary devices common to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French literature, and her confessional tone as features that elevate her fiction above the romance genre.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Brookner's Booker Prize—winning *Hotel du Lac* focuses on an Englishwoman who travels to Geneva to rethink her life. Other works about foreigners in Geneva include:

Daisy Miller (1878), a novella by Henry James. The ebullient young American girl, Daisy Miller, travels to Switzerland and Italy and falls victim to her own flighty nature in this oft-studied short work by James.

Doctor Fischer of Geneva or The Bomb Party (1980), a novel by Graham Greene. This somewhat bleak novel centers on a rich Englishman living in Geneva who gives dinner parties in which he humiliates his guests.

Frankenstein (1818), a novel by Mary Shelley. Geneva is the hometown of the original mad scientist Victor Frankenstein, and much of the action in the novel takes place in and around Switzerland.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Brookner has received both praise and criticism for her portrayal of women. Choose one of Brookner's female central characters and examine her as a role model for women. What messages does that character send? Would you want to live that life?
- 2. Brookner was a successful art historian before she became a novelist. Research other writers who had prior careers and then turned to writing later in life. How does their previous work experience affect their writing careers, overriding themes, and literary techniques?
- 3. Brookner claimed that Henry James and Charles Dickens were the two novelists who influenced her the most. Research either one and look for signs of influence in Brookner's work.
- 4. *Hotel du Lac* won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1984. Who were the other finalists, and why was it a controversial year for this prize?
- 5. Brookner has been much admired as a prose stylist. Choose one passage from her novels that is particularly well written and examine it for literary techniques. Which of these techniques do you think she employed consciously and which intuitively?

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Brigid Brophy

BORN: 1929, London, England

DIED: 1995, Louth, Lincolnshire, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Novels, essays, short stories, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The King of a Rainy Country (1956)

The Finishing Touch (1963)

In Transit (1969)

Overview

Brigid Brophy, who died in 1995 after a long struggle against multiple sclerosis, lived one of the most interesting, emblematic careers among writers of her generation. She was an "enfant terrible" of the 1960s, a fearless controversial figure, a tireless champion of a broader sphere of human and animal rights, and a campaigner for the dignity and prosperity of the writer's profession. Brophy produced a varied and extensive body of work. Influenced by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories, Ronald Firbank's literary style, and George Bernard Shaw's aesthetics, Brophy's writings express unconventional and controversial opinions about modern relationships, religious education in schools, and gender issues.



Brigid Brophy Brophy, Brigid, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Her work often incorporates elements of farce, word play, and witty social satire. After early and extravagant fame, she later lapsed into obscurity. By the time of her death, Brophy's work was mostly out of print.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Irish Influences Born June 12, 1929, the only daughter of Irish novelist John Brophy, Brigid Antonia Brophy spent her childhood in London but frequently visited Ireland and was raised on Irish ideas. She was a precocious reader and, she maintained, a hereditary writer. As a child, she began writing poetic dramas and read works by Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, and Ronald Firbank. Reportedly, she read James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake (1939) at the age of nine. She learned English and Latin from her mother and the beginnings of her tools as a writer from her father. She remained devoted to both parents all through their lives but said, ten years after her father's death, that she had been closer to him because they had more in common.

Brophy began her education at St. Paul's Girls' School and later attended four terms at Oxford University, where she excelled as a scholar but was expelled for

disciplinary problems. After Oxford, she took a variety of clerical jobs, writing in her spare time. Her first collection of stories, The Crown Princess, and Other Stories, appeared in 1953, receiving some admiring reviews. Later that year she published her first novel, Hackenfeller's Ape (1953), which won the Cheltenham Literary Festival first prize for a first novel. The book, which deals with animal rights, among other topics, reflected and fostered an interest in animal rights among intellectuals at Oxford. This led to the formation of the Oxford Group, which aimed to establish animal rights and promote the idea of humane treatment of animals in mainstream culture. Brophy was instrumental in the actions of the Oxford Group, and an article she wrote on the subject of animal rights for the Sunday Times in 1965 is often cited as one of the first major works of journalism on the topic.

Literary Success and a Daunting Diagnosis From there, she went on to publish several novels, a number of short stories, and nonfiction books ranging from collections of journalistic essays to biographies. In 1974 Brophy joined the Writers Guild of Great Britain as a member of its executive council and the Anti-Vivisection Society of Great Britain, serving as vice president; the two positions reflected well her lifelong commitments to both art and activism in various forms. She published her last novel, Palace without Chairs, in 1978. The next year Brophy was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, which worsened until she was housebound and confined to a wheelchair.

Until 1979, Brophy remained a public figure; she broadcast regularly on television and radio, wrote copiously for periodicals, and appeared at literary festivals. Most of her novels appeared in the 1960s; her campaigns on behalf of writers occupied more of her time in the 1970s. She published four books after the onset of her illness, including *Baroque 'n' Roll* (1987), a collection of essays that recount her struggles with the debilitating disease. Eventually Brophy was moved into a London nursing home. She died on August 7, 1995.

Works in Literary Context

Brophy took on the role of novelist, essayist, critic, and advocate for writers and social causes. She reflected all of what was odd and endearing about the 1960s, writing about feminism, pacifism, atheism, vegetarianism, and animal rights, among other things. Brophy had much to speak out on in that turbulent era, and she expressed her controversial opinions on everything from marriage to the Vietnam War in a witty, direct way. According to critic Leslie Dock, Brophy's fiction incorporates musical patterns and shifting tempos, a use of language meant to mirror cinematic or photographic effects, and architectural images that enrich the narrative texture.

An Untimely (Post-) Modernist? In the Review of Contemporary Fiction (Fall 1995), Steven Moore attributes the unjust neglect of Brophy's work to her being

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Brophy's famous contemporaries include:

Václav Havel (1936–): Renowned playwright and author, Havel was both the last president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of the independent Czech Republic.

W. G. Sebald (1944–2001): Sebald has been hailed by many as the greatest German writer of the postwar period. His novels are known for their lucid but surreal shifts in perspective and style, for the way they attempt to come to terms with history and memory by approaching them from a variety of angles.

Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982): After Joseph Stalin, Brezhnev was the longest-serving general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

John Arden (1930–1973): Arden, an English playwright, is associated with the social realist drama of the 1950s. He later turned to experimental theater and improvisation.

Paul Bowles (1910–1999): American composer, novelist, and travel writer, Bowles has been celebrated for his 1949 novel *The Sheltering Sky*, which was successfully adapted to film in 1990 by Italian director and Academy Award–winner Bernardo Bertolucci.

"cursed for being too far ahead of her time; in her 1953 novel *Hackenfeller's Ape* she was writing about animal rights long before the cause became popular, and in 1969 she published the definitive novel about gender confusion (*In Transit*) long before there was a critical context for the topic." Critics are unable to place her as modernist, realist, or postmodernist, although *In Transit: An Heroicyclic Novel*, at least, possesses features "today associated with modernism/postmodernism: tones that run from deadpan black humor to specious seriousness to mock learnedness, typographical unconventionalities, metafictional asides, fractured plots and subplots and juxtaposed set pieces, diagrams and puzzles, puns and portmanteau words, genre parodies and conflations, intertextuality and Barthesian bliss, camp and kitsch."

Works in Critical Context

Throughout her career, Brophy was one of the most controversial writers in England, promoting her views in books and articles as well as on television and radio. For instance, she advocated for and succeeded in the establishment of the British Public Lending Right, which pays royalties to authors whenever their books are checked out of libraries; referred to marriage as "an immoral institution"; exhorted the better treatment of animals long before it was popular; and wrote about gender confusion

before a critical context for the topic existed. Many critics have admired Brophy's wit and social criticism, although others have considered her experiments with language, structure, and narrative as major hindrances to comprehending the themes of her fiction. However, Brophy's critical reputation has declined considerably since the early 1980s—the majority of her books remain out of print—despite the freshness and contemporary literary relevance of many of her ideas. Chris Hopkins has argued that this is in part because Brophy's work resists standard literary classifications and categories like realism, modernism, and postmodernism. He has also concluded, however, that Brophy's "books have much to contribute to the current interest in [the postmodern feature of playing with boundaries], as well as to a more various history of twentieth-century literature."

Black Ship to Hell Black Ship to Hell, published in 1962, is an ambitious exploration of the dynamics of hate. Often maddeningly mechanical in its application of Freudian theory to life, it is still an intellectual tour de force. It was fiercely attacked by reviewers, but Peter Porter summed it up accurately in The Listener: "Miss Brophy has found a new way of being creative. She disguises her book as a critical work; it seems to me a loving fiction of opinion."

In Transit Brophy's avant-garde work In Transit: An Heroicycle Novel was a difficult book for some reviewers to characterize. In S. J. Newman's opinion, "though subtitled 'an heroicycle novel," In Transit is less a novel than a cross between a neurotic essay in criticism and a farcical nightmare.... The book is best described as an anti-antinovel...[and] the protagonist... is nothing more than a voice." Though some reviewers could not discern a plot, those who did explain that a young girl, Patricia, is waiting at an airport, "a sort of Kennedy Terminal of the psyche," described Elizabeth Hardwick in Vogue, when a sudden amnesia sets in. The girl's identity fades; indeed, she cannot remember her name or her gender. The remainder of the story describes the girl's struggle for personal redefinition.

According to Robert Phelps in Life magazine, In Transit brings to the forefront the concept of the multifaceted individual: "At his innermost center,...[a person] is many things, many appetites, all genders....In his soul, he is as polymorphous as the angels. . . . Patricia's breakdown is actually a break-through: her tough little ego is fighting for its birthright, and on the last page of *In* Transit, she has died, been reborn, and is about to assume a more spacious selfhood." Guy Davenport, in National Review, was less enthused, writing, "It is not at all clear just what's going on by way of action." Davenport, like others, found that In Transit's experimental style leads to confusion. But what he, with many reviewers, may well have neglected is the way in which such confusion is mimetic. That is, in provoking an almost paralyzing confusion in readers, Brophy asks us

to identify all the more with her gender-troubled protagonist.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Research the origins of the animal rights movement and Brophy's involvement. What is the relationship between Brophy's writing and the animal rights movement? How does her involvement in this movement relate to the themes that are present throughout her literary production?
- 2. Discuss the theme of identity and gender confusion in *In Transit*. What is the significance of the airport setting in this novel?
- 3. In what ways do Brophy's experimental approaches to fiction enhance and detract from your ability to comprehend her themes and positions? Choose one particular novel and imagine how its meaning would be shifted if it were presented in a "straightforward" fashion. Structure your thoughts in the form of an analytical essay, with a clear, arguable thesis.
- 4. Research the literary movement of naturalism. In a class discussion, explain why Brophy's *The King of a Rainy Country* has been identified as belonging to this tradition.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Brophy's style is part of a trend in literature that seeks to get at human truths through the experience of confusion. Other works that ask us to press against and beyond the boundaries of our own understanding include:

Absalom, Absalom! (1936), a novel by William Faulkner.
Although definitively a product of the modernist
moment in history, this class tragedy of the American
Deep South heralds the arrival of literary
postmodernism.

The Crying of Lot 49 (1966), a novel by Thomas Pynchon. This postmodernist novel has the undisputed virtue of brevity; it has a fast-moving plot and is open to several interpretations.

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (1759), a novel by Laurence Sterne. This classic British novel includes long narratives and is filled with many twists and inversions.

Parker, Peter. "Aggressive, Witty & Unrelenting': Brigid Brophy and Ronald Firbank." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 15 (Fall 1995): 68–78.

Smith, Patricia. "Desperately Seeking Susan[na]:
Closeted Quests and Mozartean Gender Bending in
Brigid Brophy's *The King of a Rainy Country*."
Review of Contemporary Fiction 15 (1995): 23–31.

Bizabeth Barrett Browning

BORN: 1806, Durham, England DIED: 1861, Florence, Italy

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: *Poetry*MAJOR WORKS:

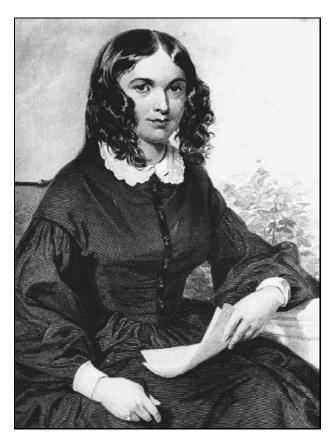
Sonnets from the Portuguese (1850)

Aurora Leigh (1856)

Essays on the Greek Christian Poets and the English Poets (1863)

Overview

Elizabeth Barrett Browning is recognized as a powerful voice of social criticism, as well as an innovative poet whose experiments with rhyme and diction have influenced movements in poetry throughout the years. Although Barrett Browning is best remembered today for *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, a collection of love poems, she also wrote about social oppression with the same depth of emotion.



Elizabeth Barrett Browning Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Large Family with a Domineering Father Elizabeth Barrett was born on March 6, 1806, near Durham, England, to Edward Barrett Moulton-Barrett, a native of St. James, Jamaica, and Mary Graham-Clarke. The oldest of eleven surviving children of a wealthy and domineering father, she had eight brothers and two sisters. While forbidding his daughters to marry, her father nevertheless encouraged their scholarly pursuits. Her father was so proud of Elizabeth's extraordinary ability in classical studies that he privately published her 1,462-line narrative The Battle of Marathon when she was fourteen.

An Accomplished Scholar and Writer, Despite Illness In 1821, Barrett and her sisters began suffering from headaches, side pain, twitching muscles, and general discomfort. While her sisters recovered quickly, Barrett did not. She was treated for a spinal problem, though doctors could not diagnose her exact malady. Recent examination of Barrett's symptoms has led to a hypothesis that she suffered from either tuberculosis of the spine or bronchial difficulties. Tuberculosis infected nearly seven in ten people in England in the early nineteenth

century, before doctors understood how the disease was spread.

Even with her physical problems, Barrett continued to study and write, and she anonymously published An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems in 1826. The volume established what would become a theme in contemporary criticism—Barrett's unusual, even "unwomanly," scholarly knowledge. Barrett published Prometheus Bound: Translated from the Greek of Aeschylus, and Miscellaneous Poems in 1833, again anonymously, followed by The Seraphim, and Other Poems, the first book published under her own name, in 1838. The collection attracted much favorable attention.

During Barrett's early years of publishing, she suffered two devastating losses: the unexpected death of her mother and the forced auction of her family home. Barrett's father moved the family to London in 1835. At this time, Barrett was in such poor health that her physician recommended she live for a while in a warmer climate. Torquay, on the south coast of England, was selected, and she remained there for three years as an invalid as various members of her family took turns living with her and caring for her.

When she returned to the family's London home, she felt that she had left her youth behind and that the future held little more than permanent infirmity and confinement to her bedroom. Despite her frail health, she was more fortunate in her circumstances than most female writers of her time. Thanks to inheritances from her grandmother and her uncle, she was the only one of the Barrett children who was independently wealthy. As the oldest daughter in a family without a mother, she normally would have been expected to spend much of her time supervising the domestic servants, but her weakness prevented her from leaving her room. Relieved of all household burdens and financial cares, she was free to devote herself to her intellectual and creative pursuits.

Literary Success and Marriage Publication of her 1844 two-volume collection *Poems* established Barrett as one of the major poets of her day. The most important work of her life, however, turned out to be a single poem. Barrett admired the work of Robert Browning, a little-known poet six years her junior, and she expressed her appreciation of him in a poem of her own. Browning responded in a letter to Barrett, the first of 574 that they exchanged over the next twenty months. The letter began abruptly: "I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett." He continued, "I do, as I say, love these Books with all my heart—and I love you too." Browning became a frequent visitor, not only inspiring Barrett's poetry but also encouraging her to exercise outdoors to improve her health.

In September 1846, ignoring her history of poor health and her father's disapproval, Barrett quietly married Browning. Her father never spoke to her again. The couple moved to Italy and settled in Florence in 1848,

where their only child was born in March 1849. The birth of her son and the intellectually stimulating presence of her husband inspired a creative energy in Barrett Browning that she had never before experienced. She complained to her husband that, in comparison to his worldly experiences, she had lived like a blind poet.

Sonnets from the Portuguese The courtship of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning inspired Barrett Browning's series of forty-four Petrarchan sonnets, recognized as one of the finest sonnet sequences in English. Written during their 1845–1846 correspondence, Sonnets from the Portuguese remained Barrett Browning's secret until 1849, when she presented the collection to her husband. Despite his conviction that a writer's private life should remain sealed from the public, he felt the quality of these works demanded publication. They appeared in Barrett Browning's 1850 edition of Poems, her personal history thinly concealed by a title that implies the poems are translations.

Italian Politics Barrett Browning's subject matter became increasingly bold. "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," a dramatic monologue, powerfully criticizes institutionalized slavery, showing herself to be in full sympathy with the abolitionist movement in the United States. Casa Guidi Windows (1851) records Barrett Browning's reactions to the Italian struggle for unity. The unification of the various Italian states into one country in 1861 was the culmination of a movement known as the Risorgimento, which was made up of a series of regional revolutions and struggles in Italy. These were seen as a continuation of the American and French revolutions decades earlier. Barrett Browning was in sympathy with the Italian revolutionaries. The volume showed her increasing conviction that poetry should be actively involved in life and, perhaps more importantly, her confidence that a female poet should speak out about political and social issues. In this respect, Barrett Browning differed from such English writers as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë or Emily Brontë, all of whom seemed to avoid any mention of world politics in their novels.

Barrett Browning's passionate engagement in Italian politics was also the subject of her 1860 collection, *Poems before Congress*. Barrett Browning criticizes political inaction that allows crimes against individual liberty. Furthermore, she focuses on a nation's moral identity and asserts that it is a woman's responsibility to be vocal about political issues. Instead of praising Barrett Browning's combination of womanly feeling and manly thought, as notices of earlier works had done, reviewers of this volume complained that she had trespassed into masculine subjects.

Novelistic Experiment Barrett Browning remained concerned about social issues in England during this period as well. Her *Aurora Leigh* (1856) is an ambitious novel in blank verse that embodies both Barrett Brown-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Browning's famous contemporaries include:

George Sand (1804–1876): "George Sand" was the pen name of Aurore Dupin, a French feminist and novelist who lived an unconventional life.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886): Most work by this famously reclusive American poet was discovered and published after her death.

Mary Russell Mitford (1787–1855): A close friend of Barrett Browning's, Mitford was an English novelist and playwright.

Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872): Mazzini, an Italian politician and revolutionary, advocated uniting the various states and kingdoms into one independent republic via a popular uprising.

Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882): Garibaldi was an Italian soldier who was instrumental in bringing about a unified Italian republic.

Charles Fourier (1772–1837): This French philosopher created the word *féminisme* in 1837 and argued that women's rights were a logical extension of social progress.

ing's strengths and weaknesses as a writer. It bluntly argues that the topic of ambitious poetry should not be the remote chivalry of a distant past but the present day as experienced by ordinary people. *Aurora Leigh* achieves this goal of societal relevance, for it deals with an array of pressing Victorian social problems such as the exploitation of seamstresses, limited employment opportunities for women, sexual double standards, drunkenness, domestic violence, schisms between economic and social classes, and various plans for reform. Nothing stirred up more controversy than Barrett Browning's candid treatment of the situation of the "fallen woman"—a subject that was considered by the Victorian public to be outside the sight or understanding of a serious novelist or poet.

Barrett Browning fell ill with a sore throat and cold on June 20, 1861. A rupture of abscesses in her lungs proved fatal, and she died in her husband's arms on June 29. In early 1862, Robert Browning published a final collection of his wife's poetry as *Last Poems*, compiled from a list she had drawn up herself. Some of the twenty-eight poems were written prior to her marriage, some on recent political and personal events. Some of the pieces in *Last Poems* address the power imbalance in relationships between men and women. Reviews of this final volume sounded familiar inconsistencies: commending Barrett Browning for her purity and womanly nature while charging that her verse was coarse, irreverent, and infected by excessive anti-English political fervor.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's work argued, in part, that women were as capable as men. Here are some other works that argue for equality between the sexes:

A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1791), a nonfiction work by Mary Wollstonecraft. This text argues that women should receive an education and similar rights to men

The Woman in Her House (1881), a nonfiction work by Concepción Arenal. In this book, the Spanish feminist argues that women should aim to be more than simply wives and mothers.

Story of an African Farm (1973), a novel by Mary Daly. The South African writer's first novel tells of three white children growing up in South Africa.

"Ain't I a Woman?" (1851), by Sojourner Truth. This speech, given at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention by a political activist and former slave, argues against the myth of the delicate woman.

Works in Literary Context

Barrett Browning's unorthodox rhyme and diction, once scorned, have been cited more recently as daring experiments. Kathryn Burlinson writes that "the half-rhymes, as well as the metrical irregularities, neologisms, compoundwords, and lacunae that infuriated or disturbed her contemporaries now appear among the most interesting aspects of her work. [Virginia] Woolf's claim that Barrett Browning had 'some complicity in the development of modern poetry' is an acute reminder that she influenced many later poets, not only the Pre-Raphaelites but 20th-century authors such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon."

Unconventional Sonnets Sonnets from the Portuguese breaks with the conventions of the Elizabethan sonnet sequence—so closely associated with Dante Alighieri and William Shakespeare-by making the speaker a woman. Such poems were highly unusual in English literature during Barrett Browning's time because they directly express female physical desire. The poems further challenge Petrarchan conventions by making marriage not the obstruction of love but its fulfillment. Margaret Reynolds commented, "This time, in the Sonnets from the Portuguese, the speaking subject is clearly a woman and a poet. Her beloved is in a different style too, he is also a poet and a speaking subject. By the end of the sequence of forty-four poems they are equal...she escapes an old regime where she was enjoined to silence or riddles, and she transforms herself into a speaking subject who can take her own story to market."

A New Kind of Fiction This blank-verse poem, nearly eleven thousand lines longer than Milton's Paradise Lost, constitutes a new genre, for it is simultaneously an epic and a drama. In a sense, Barrett Browning's version of modern epic develops from Wordsworth's own adaptation of the genre for his time; however, while he chose the poet's autobiography as his subject, Barrett Browning contrived an ambitious fiction that is simultaneously an autobiography of an artist, a love story, and a poem of social protest. Novelist George Eliot said that she read Aurora Leigh at least three times and declared Barrett Browning "the first woman who has produced a work which exhibits all the peculiar powers without the negations of her sex."

Works in Critical Context

The critical view of Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a major poet—not to mention the greatest female poet of her time—persisted nearly to the end of the nineteenth century, when attention shifted to her life. Interest in her life then overshadowed the value of her work. As Barrett Browning became romanticized as a loving wife, her outspoken critique of her culture, her visionary social critique, and even her technical daring faded from the picture, leaving in its place a sentimental parody of both the work and the woman. Reconsideration of her poetry by feminist critics since the 1970s, however, increasingly values its modernity, specifically in its depiction of sexual politics and more broadly in its explanation of economic and political issues.

Sonnets from the Portuguese When Sonnets from the Portuguese was first published, most critics ignored the work. It was not until a few years later, when the autobiographical nature of the poems became known, that the sonnets received widespread critical recognition. Response to the poems was glowingly favorable. Early commentators praised their sincerity and intensity; most agreed that no woman had ever written in such openly passionate tones. In addition, it was argued that the emotion of Barrett Browning's verse was effectively balanced by the strict technical restraints of the sonnet form. Several critics compared the adept technique utilized in the sonnets to that of John Milton and Shakespeare.

By the turn of the century, critics became more cautious in their praise. Barrett Browning's emotional expression was reevaluated in later years; what had been earlier defined as impassioned honesty was now considered overbearingly sentimental. Angela Leighton says, "Recent feminist critics...tend to pass over these ideologically unfashionable poems. Somehow, their subject and their inspiration, which lack the larger sexual politics of *Aurora Leigh*, strike contemporary critics as naked and naive. They are, it is said with wearying regularity, simply too 'sincere.'"

On the other hand, some critics have stressed such technical merits of the sonnets as their structure and

imagery and have expressed admiration for the cycle in its entirety. Jerome Mazzaro writes, "At times, in the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, form and content are so deliberately left at odds to mark not excess but empty and artificial boundaries that periodically, on grounds independent of sincerity, critics...have called the competence of Barrett Browning's verse technique into question."

Both as a revealing chronicle of a famous love story and as a technically skilled rendering of poetry's most demanding form, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* endures as a testimony to Barrett Browning's poetic skills. According to Reynolds, they are "accessible enough to be used by everyone, sentimental enough to be felt by us all. Since . . . the so-called Browning love letters were published, the Brownings' romance and Barrett Browning's poems have become the true measure of romantic love."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Barret Browning's sonnet "How Do I Love Thee?" is by far her most well known. Read the sonnet for yourself and think carefully about the poet's choices throughout the poem. What do you think accounts for this poem's enduring popularity?
- 2. Think about the writers, actors, and musicians that you like. How does knowing the details of their personal lives affect your experience of their art? In other words, do you get distracted by their personal life when reading, watching, or listening to their work?
- 3. Today, most people accept that men and women are equally intelligent. However, far fewer women than men pursue math and science careers, but girls tend to get higher grades than boys do. Using your library and the Internet, research the possible reasons for these unusual facts and then write a plan for "leveling the playing field."
- 4. Barret Browning was avidly interested in the unification of Italy, or the *Risorgimento*, that was under way while she lived in that country. An excellent novel set during this period is Giuseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* (1958), a huge best seller in Italy. The novel was made into an award-winning film of the same name in 1963.

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® Robert Browning

BORN: 1812, Camberwell, England

DIED: 1889, Venice, Italy NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: *Poetry*MAJOR WORKS:

Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession (1833)

Paracelsus (1835)

Men and Women (1855)

Dramatis Personae (1864)

The Poetical Works of Robert Browning (1868)

The Ring and the Book (1868)

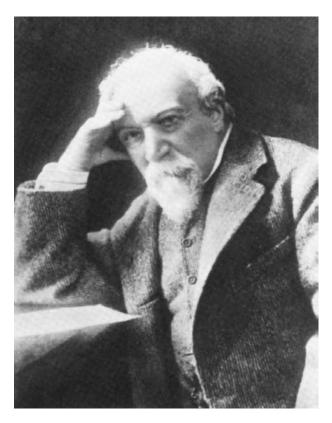
Overview

Victorian poet Robert Browning is chiefly remembered for his mastery of the dramatic monologue and for the remarkable diversity and range of his works. By vividly portraying a central character against a social background, his poems probe complex human motives in a variety of historical periods. As a highly individual force in the history of English poetry, Browning made significant innovations in language and versification and had a profound influence on numerous twentieth-century poets, including such key figures as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Browning was born on May 7, 1812, in Camberwell, London. His father, a senior clerk in the Bank of England, provided a comfortable living for his family and passed on a love of art and literature to his son. His mother, an excellent amateur pianist, instilled in him a love of music. Encouraged to read in his father's library, which housed a collection of over six thousand volumes, Browning's intellectual development included the poetry of Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, as well as coursework in Latin, Greek, English, and German. In 1828, Browning entered the University of London, but he dropped out after half a year, determined to pursue a career as a poet.

Mixed Success with Early Poems and Plays Browning began to write verses at the age of six. His first published work was Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession (1833), which was issued anonymously. The hero of the



Robert Browning Browning, Robert, photograph.

poem is a young poet, obviously Browning himself, who bares his soul to a patient heroine. Although his next poem, *Paracelsus* (1835), did not satisfy Browning, it brought favorable reviews and important friendships with fellow poets William Wordsworth and Thomas Carlyle. Browning also became acquainted with the actor William C. Macready. Encouraged, Browning turned to writing drama. Unfortunately, Browning's first play, *Strafford* (1837), closed after only five performances. During the next ten years, Browning wrote six other plays, none of which were successfully produced. All of Browning's plays are marred by overemphasis of character analysis and lack of dramatic action.

In 1838 Browning traveled to northern Italy to acquire firsthand knowledge of its setting and atmosphere for his next long poem, *Sordello* (1840), but it, too, was panned by critics who called it obscure and unreadable. After the disappointing reception of his drama along with two of his poetic works, Browning turned to the dramatic monologue. He experimented with and perfected this form in the long poem *Pippa Passes* (1841) and two collections of shorter poems, *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) and *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845).

Marriage to Elizabeth Barrett Despite their overall lack of favorable attention, Browning's works had famous admirers, including Elizabeth Barrett, who was a respected and popular poet when in 1844 she praised

Browning in one of her works and received a grateful letter from him in response. The two met the following year, fell in love, and in 1846, ignoring the disapproval of her father, eloped to Italy, where—except for brief intervals—they spent all of their time together. It was there that their son, Robert Wiedeman Barrett Browning, was born in 1849. The Brownings lived in Italy during the climax of the *Risorgimento*, or the movement toward Italian unification, which culminated in the establishment of the unified kingdom of Italy in 1861.

Dramatic Monologues and Mature Poetry In 1855, Browning published Men and Women, a collection of fifty-one poems. Though the volume contained many of the dramatic monologues that are best known and loved by modern readers, it was not popular with Browning's contemporaries. Nevertheless, it did receive several positive critical reviews.

After gradually declining in health for several years, Elizabeth Barrett Browning died on June 29, 1861. Browning found that he could no longer remain in Florence because of the memories it held for him. He resolved to "go to England, and live and work and write." In 1864 he published Dramatis Personae. Though some of the dramatic monologues in the collection are complex, difficult, and too long, this was the first of Browning's works to be popular with the general reading public. His popularity increased with the publication of The Ring and the Book (1869). Enthusiastically received by the public, this long poem, composed of twelve dramatic monologues in which the major characters give their interpretations of a crime, resulted in Browning's becoming a prominent figure in London society. He was a frequent guest at dinners, concerts, and receptions. In the next ten years, Browning wrote with great energy, publishing a volume almost every year.

Later Years as a Victorian "Sage" By 1870, Browning had a solid literary reputation. In his later years, Browning became that curious phenomenon, the Victorian sage, widely regarded for his knowledge and his explorations of Victorian life's great philosophical questions. In 1880 the Browning Society was established in London for the purpose of paying tribute to and studying his poems, and near the end of his life he was the recipient of various other honors, including a degree from Oxford University and an audience with Queen Victoria. Following his death in 1889 while staying in Venice, he was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Works in Literary Context

Although Browning's early poems were not successes, they are important for understanding Browning's poetic aspirations and for the opportunity they provide the reader to trace Browning's developing philosophy and developing poetic techniques. As Browning learned to temper the Romantic idealism of Shelley, he began to develop the techniques of representing character action.

The result was a combination of dramatic and lyric expression that would take form in the dramatic monologue.

Dramatic Monologue Scholars agree that Browning's place in English literature is based to a great extent on his contribution to the poetic genre of the dramatic monologue, the form he adopted for a large number of his works. With his diverse topics, striking use of language, and stylistic creativity, his groundbreaking accomplishments in this genre constitute the basis of his reputation. Literary historians define the dramatic monologue as a poem in which the speaker's character is gradually disclosed in a dramatic situation through his or her own words. In "Fra Lippo Lippi," for example, the hypocritical nature of the narrator becomes increasingly apparent to the reader as the poem progresses. As the monk speaks, he reveals aspects of his personality of which even he is unaware; the voice of the poet is absent from the poem altogether.

Whether he chose a historical or an imaginary figure, a reliable or an unreliable narrator, Browning evolved the techniques of exposing a character's personality to an unprecedented degree of subtlety and psychological depth. As few previous poets had done, he explored the makeup of the mind, scrutinizing the interior lives of his characters. His protagonists vary from sophisticated theologians and artists to simple peasant children, spanning a range of personalities from the pure and innocent to the borderline psychotic. A considerable number of Browning's men and women, however, exemplify his overriding interest in thwarted or twisted personalities whose lives are scarred by jealousy, lust, or avarice.

A World of Words In addition to its psychological depth, critics agree that one of the main strengths of Browning's work is its sheer abundance and variety in terms of subject matter, time, place, and character. His difficult subjects demand intellectual effort from the reader and reflect the enormous breadth of his interests in science, history, art, and music. His primary source of inspiration was Renaissance Italy; its unsurpassed artistic accomplishments and rich religious and political history provided him with many of his themes and characters. Nevertheless, his settings range from the Middle Ages to his own era, reflecting a diverse assortment of cultures.

Browning's poetic diction also shows the influence of many cultures and fields of interest. He introduced a large and varied vocabulary into his works, using not only colloquial and traditionally unpoetic language, but also obscure and specialized terms drawn from the past or from contemporary science. Rough syntax, contractions, and the rejection of the vague imagery of romantic poetry in favor of more exact and blunt forms of expression also characterize his writings. Like his use of language, Browning's approach to verse was frequently unconventional. In assessing this facet of his poetry, scholars

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Browning's famous contemporaries include:

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): Queen of England from 1837, Victoria wrote numerous letters and over one hundred volumes of journals.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862): This American author wrote *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854), his famous account of his two-year experiment in self-sufficiency.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): Darwin was a naturalist and scientist who introduced the concept of evolutionary natural selection.

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–1865): This British author wrote the first biography of Charlotte Brontë, which sparked controversy because it contained allegedly libelous statements that had to be retracted.

emphasize the variety of his invention—his use of uncommon rhymes and his metrical and stanzaic flexibility.

Works in Critical Context

Although Robert Browning's work consistently attracted critical attention, it was not always positive. When John Stuart Mill commented that the anonymous author of Browning's first major published piece (a semi-autobiographical love poem) seemed "possessed with a more intense and morbid self-consciousness than I ever knew in any sane human being," Browning resolved never again to reveal his thoughts directly to his readers. Henceforth, he would "only make men and women speak."

Early Reviewers The critical history of Browning's works initially shows a pattern of slow recognition followed by enormous popularity and even adulation in the two decades prior to his death. His reputation subsequently declined, but gradually recovered with the appearance in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s of important biographical and critical studies by William C. DeVane and other scholars. Browning's early reviewers often complained about the obscurity, incomprehensibility, and awkward language of his works, an impression largely arising from Sordello. When Browning did achieve fame with Dramatis Personae and The Ring and the Book, it was considerable. His Victorian audience considered him a profound philosophical thinker and teacher who had chosen poetry as his medium of instruction. Scholars point out that if his contemporaries continued to regard his poetry as rough-hewn, unnecessarily challenging, and obscure, they found its difficulties justified by what they

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Browning is best known for the dramatic monologue form in which a single speaker, who is not the poet, speaks to someone within the context of the poem. That audience remains silent during the monologue, creating a tension between what the speaker is saying and what that audience may be thinking. Here are other works that use the dramatic monologue form:

"The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), a short story by Edgar Allan Poe. Poe's famous short story is narrated by a mentally unstable murderer.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917), a poem by T.S. Eliot. The insecure, aging Prufrock ponders his place in the universe.

"Lady Lazarus" (1962), a poem by Sylvia Plath. Plath explores the legacy of the Holocaust in this dark poem. Fires in the Mirror (1992), a play by Anna Deavere Smith. Smith weaves multiple monologues into this powerful work that examines the various points of view surrounding the 1991 Crown Heights riots in Brooklyn, New York.

considered the depth and profundity of his religious faith and optimism.

Twentieth-Century Criticism Although the Victorians were mistaken in their conception of Browning as philosophically cheerful and optimistic in his outlook on life, modern critics generally agree that this image contributed to the reaction against his works beginning at the turn of the century. In 1900, for example, George Santayana attacked Browning in an essay entitled "The Poetry of Barbarism," setting the tone for an era that found Browning's mind superficial, his poetic skills crude, and his language verbose. Describing the reasons for Browning's poor reputation throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century, DeVane stated that the poet's outlook on life "seemed incredibly false to generations harried by war and a vast social unrest." Despite this critical disfavor, scholars now recognize that Browning's works had a significant impact on early twentiethcentury poets in both England and America.

Critics cite in particular the influence of Browning's diction on the poetic language of Ezra Pound and the effect of his dramatic monologues on the pivotal works of T.S. Eliot. In addition to its considerable influence, the value of Browning's work in its own right continues to be reassessed, with commentators focusing less on the philosophical aspects of his writings and more on his strengths as a genuinely original artist. While Browning's reputation has never again been as prominent as it was

during his lifetime, few scholars would deny his importance or influence.

Responses to Literature

- 1. The insanity defense typically refers to a plea that defendants are not guilty because they lacked the mental capacity to realize that they committed a wrong or appreciate why it was wrong. Some states also allow defendants to argue that they understood their behavior was criminal but were unable to control it. This is sometimes called the "irresistible impulse" defense. In Browning's dramatic monologue "Porphyria's Lover," the speaker, Porphyria's lover, speaks in a calm and steady voice, even though he has actually gone insane and killed her. Do you think Porphyria's lover can plead either the insanity defense or the irresistible impulse defense? What criteria would you use to assess his mental state both at the time of the murder and at the time he is telling about it?
- You are the Duchess in "My Last Duchess." Write a letter to your best friend telling your side of the story.
- 3. In "The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," Browning portrays an envious monk so irritated by the shortcomings of his fellow monks that he fantasizes about killing them. Do you think such sentiments might have been common among monks? Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the history of one of the major Christian monastic orders in Europe. Write a paper in which you describe the life of a typical monk.

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Mikhail Bulgakov

BORN: 1891, Kiev, Russia

DIED: 1940, Moscow, USSR (now Russia)

NATIONALITY: Ukrainian GENRE: Fiction, Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The White Guard (1924)
The Fatal Eggs (1924)
Heart of a Dog (1925)
Days of the Turbins (1926)
The Master and Margarita (1966)

Overview

Considered one of the foremost satirists of postrevolutionary Russia, Mikhail Bulgakov is best known for his novel *The Master and Margarita* (1966), which is recognized as one of the greatest Russian novels of the century. Many of Bulgakov's works concern the adjustment of the Russian intellectual class to life under Communist rule. Due to official censorship of his manuscripts during his lifetime, Bulgakov's best works remained unpublished until after his death.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Family Life Bulgakov was born on May 2, 1891, in Kiev to a middle-class intellectual family. Music, literature, and theater were important in the family life of the young Bulgakov, as was religion. His father, a professor at the Kiev theological academy, instilled in his son a belief in God and an interest in spiritual matters that he would retain throughout his life.

Served in World War I Bulgakov attended Kiev's most prestigious secondary school, then continued his education as a medical student at the University of Kiev and graduated with distinction in 1916. At the time, Russia was undergoing immense change. The country was embroiled in World War I while the last Russian czar,



Mikhail Bulgakov akg-images, London / RIA Nowosti

Nicholas II, was facing opposition to his rule through rebellions in 1905 and 1917 that ultimately led to his loss of power.

Assigned to noncombat duty in the Russian army during World War I, Bulgakov worked for several months in frontline military hospitals until he transferred to a remote village, where he served as the only doctor for an entire district. His trials as an inexperienced doctor working under primitive conditions, and the difficulties he faced as an educated man among the ignorant, superstitious peasants, are recorded in the autobiographical stories of *A Country Doctor's Notebooks*.

Wrote Amidst Turmoil Upon his discharge in 1918, Bulgakov returned to Kiev in time to witness the Bolshevik Red Army, the anti-Bolshevik White Army, German occupation forces, and Ukrainian nationalists struggle for control of the city, which experienced fourteen violent changes of government in two years. While Kiev was part of several Ukrainian states that were shortlived, the city became part of the Soviet Union in 1921. By the time Nicholas II and his family were executed in 1918 by Communist Party representatives, Vladimir Lenin, a Bolshevik party leader, had assumed power and Communist-controlled Russia had become the Soviet Union.

In 1919, Bulgakov published his first story, and the following year he abandoned medicine to devote his time

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bulgakov's famous contemporaries include:

Leon Trotsky (1879–1940): One of the leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution and commander of the Red Army during the ensuing civil war, Trotsky was exiled from the Soviet Union after Stalin's rise to power. He was assassinated by a Soviet agent while living in exile in Mexico.

Lavrentiy Beria (1899–1953): Notorious head of the Soviet intelligence agency during the height of Stalin's political purges, he was eventually sentenced to death by firing squad in the wake of Stalin's death (which many blamed him for).

Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948): Highly influential Russian film director whose use of the technique of montage and other innovations changed the language of film forever. His use of villains dressed in white in *Alexander Nevsky* would later inspire George Lucas's white-clad Stormtroopers in the *Star Wars* films.

Vaslav Nijinsky (1889–1950): Widely regarded as perhaps the most talented male ballet dancer of all time, the Russian Nijinsky was noted both for his ability—particularly his leaps—and his intensity.

Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971): Soviet premier beginning in the 1950s through the mid-1960s. During Bulgakov's life, Khrushchev was a minor party functionary. In the wake of Stalin's death, he was placed in power by a faction opposed to Beria, where he would go on to denounce Stalin's tyrannical reign.

to writing feuilletons (light, popular works of fiction) for local newspapers and plays for local theaters in the Caucasian city of Vladikavkaz. In 1921, he moved to Moscow, where he struggled to support himself and his first wife by editing and writing for various newspapers, a task that he described as "a flow of hopeless grey boredom, unbroken and inexorable." With the partial publication in 1925 of the novel *The White Guard* in the magazine *Rossiya*, Bulgakov gained sufficient respect and popularity as an author to abandon newspaper work.

Political Controversy The realistic novel The White Guard (1924) was Bulgakov's first major triumph and is notable as one of the few works published in the Soviet Union that sympathetically portray the supporters of the anti-Bolshevik cause during the Russian revolutions. This outstanding novel was never reprinted in Russia, but Bulgakov's dramatic adaptation of it, The Days of the Turbins (1926), became a fixture on the Soviet stage. Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, who took power in the late 1920s after the death of Lenin, attended the production fifteen times, viewing the play as ultimately favorable to the Bolsheviks.

From 1925 to 1928, Bulgakov worked in close association with the Moscow Art Theater as a writer, producer, and occasionally an actor. His plays were all well received by audiences but denounced by party critics. In 1929, Bulgakov's works were banned for their ideological nonconformity. For the next two years, Bulgakov was unable to earn a living, and in 1930, frustrated, depressed, and penniless, he wrote to the Soviet government asking to be allowed either to work or to emigrate. Stalin personally telephoned Bulgakov three weeks later and arranged for his appointment to the Art Theater as a producer. By this time, Stalin's repressive policies led to his iron-fisted control of all aspects of society, including severe policies in the arts.

Yet, in 1932, reportedly at Stalin's request once again, Days of the Turbins was returned to the stage, making it possible for Bulgakov to have other works published and performed. He remained with the Art Theater until 1936, when he resigned in protest over what he saw as the mishandling of his drama A Cabal of Hypocrites, at which time he became a librettist for the Bolshoi Theater. Though publishing little, Bulgakov wrote steadily despite suffering from poor health and becoming blind the year before his death from nephrosclerosis in 1940.

Posthumous Fame It was not until the 1960s that Bulgakov was fully rehabilitated by the Soviet authorities. At that time the manuscripts of numerous stories and plays and of three novels were discovered and published. These works established him as one of the finest twentieth-century Russian writers. The first of the novels to appear was *Black Snow*, written in the late 1930s and a satire on the Soviet theatrical world. The second, *The Heart of a Dog* (written in 1925), is a science fantasy in which human organs are transplanted into a dog, giving it the most disgusting qualities of mankind.

Bulgakov's acknowledged masterwork, *The Master and Margarita*, developed over a period of twelve years through the drafting of eight separate versions. According to biographers, Bulgakov knew that the novel would be his masterpiece and set aside all other projects during the last years of his illness to finish it before his death. He gave copies to his wife and to a friend for safekeeping, and they remained a closely guarded secret until Bulgakov's rehabilitation during Nikita Khrushchev's cultural thaw of the late 1950s and early 1960s. (Khrushchev had taken power a few years after Stalin's death in 1953, and soon denounced his dictatorial predecessor.)

The Master and Margarita is a complex, grotesque, and fantastic satire, combining a unique interpretation of the story of Jesus with descriptions of the literary and theatrical circles of Moscow and with weird adventures caused by the mischief of the devil. The novel has many symbolic elements that can be interpreted in a great variety of ways.

Works in Literary Context

Heavily influenced by Nikolai Gogol, Bulgakov combined fantasy, realism, and satire to ridicule modern progressive society in general and the Soviet system in particular. His works celebrate the nonconformist, and often portray an artist or scientist in conflict with society. The repressive era of the 1930s in the Soviet Union crippled the publications of his works, and he wrote privately for a time when he would be able to be published again. Bulgakov also expressed reaction to his censorship and the struggle of the artist subtly in his works, especially in his dramatizations surrounding the artists Moliére, Miguel de Cervantes, and Aleksandr Pushkin.

Dramas Bulgakov is believed to have written thirty-six plays, eleven of which survive. Unlike his major prose works, Bulgakov's dramas tend toward the realistic, and are often based on historical events or figures. In direct opposition to Soviet conventions, Bulgakov refused to portray his characters as either wholly positive or negative. Rather, they are drawn as individuals with human strengths and frailties. The theme of adjustment to the new Soviet way of life dominates his plays of the 1920s. His best-known drama, Days of the Turbins, has been viewed as Moscow's most important theatrical event of the decade and served as the focus for the debate then being waged over the place of art in postrevolutionary society. The play, which deals with the life of a family of Russian intellectuals in Kiev during the civil war, was the first Soviet play to portray the White intelligentsia as sympathetic figures, rather than the malicious characters common to socialist realist productions.

Novels In addition to his dramas, Bulgakov wrote numerous short stories and novels. His first published collection of stories, Diaboliad, and Other Stories, was strongly influenced by Gogol. In them, realism dissolves into fantasy and absurdity, and light comic satire erupts into sudden brutality. Included is his best-known story, "The Fatal Eggs", in which a well-meaning scientist discovers a red ray that stimulates growth. The ray is appropriated by a bureaucrat to increase the country's chicken population, but through a mix-up produces instead a crop of giant reptiles that ravage the countryside. Critics have read the story as a satirical treatment of the Russian Revolution, or, less specifically, as a commentary on progress and a rejection of revolution in favor of evolution. "The Fatal Eggs" also introduces another of Bulgakov's favorite themes: the consequences of power in the hands of the ignorant.

The Master and Margarita was finally published in a heavily censored form in two installments in the journal Moskva in 1966 and 1967. A blend of satire, realism, and fantasy, the novel is not easily classified or reduced to a single interpretation. Most critics agree that The Master and Margarita is composed of three narrative strands. The first concerns the devil (named Woland) and his associates,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Bulgakov was one of several Russian authors who have blended nationalistic themes with an earnest and searching inquiry into the meaning of being Russian. Here are some other works that explore similar themes:

The Gulag Archipelago (1973), a nonfiction book by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn based his account of the Soviet Union's system of secret political prisons on eyewitness testimony and personal experience.

Taras Bulba (1835), a novel by Nikolai Gogol. Called the "Russian *Iliad,*" this historical novel of Russian Cossack horsemen fighting against Polish invaders was fundamental in defining the soul of modern Russian nationalism.

The Bronze Horseman (1833), a poem by Aleksandr Pushkin. This poem contrasts the everyday needs of the individual with the impersonal interests of the state through a depiction of the conflict between a victim of flooding in St. Petersburg and a statue of Czar Peter the Great, who had ordered the city to be built despite its location on a flood plain.

War and Peace (1869), a novel by Leo Tolstoy. Considered by many to be the greatest novel ever written, this epic work follows the fates of a large cast of characters, most hailing from five aristocratic Russian families, as their individual destinies are swept up in events far greater than their own lives.

who visit modern Moscow and create havoc in the lives of the stupid, the scheming, and the avaricious. The second deals with a persecuted novelist (The Master) and his mistress (Margarita), who bargains with Woland for the sake of her beloved. The third level of the book is the Master's novel, a retelling of the story of Pilate and Christ that involved a tremendous amount of research into the history of Jerusalem and early Christian thought.

Works in Critical Context

Bulgakov was reviewed with respect during his lifetime, although it was not until the world saw *The Master and Margarita*, published almost thirty years after his death, that he came to be generally recognized as one of the great talents of the twentieth century. During his lifetime, his literary reputation stood mostly on the quality of the plays that he wrote for the Moscow theater. Because of the totalitarian nature of Soviet politics, critics were at least as concerned with the plays' political content as with their artistic merit. In the years after his death, Bulgakov's reputation grew slowly.

Mixed Reaction to His Plays When Days of the Turbins premiered, critical opposition was violent. Party

critics immediately accused Bulgakov of glorifying the class enemy and denounced the play as counterrevolutionary. Nevertheless, playgoers who had lost relatives in the civil war identified with the Turbin family and flocked to performances. According to one account, "The women were hysterical; there were tears in the eyes of the men."

Bulgakov's next play, *Zoya's Apartment*, concerns the goings-on at a brothel disguised as a sewing shop in Moscow in the 1920s. A comic melodrama, the play satirizes Communist institutions and life under the New Economic Policy. Popular with audiences, it was condemned by Soviet critics for being "pornographic" as well as for failing to convey the proper ideological viewpoint. His next play, *The Crimson Island*, a comic attack on censorship, prompted counterattacks on Bulgakov's reputation and was taken out of the Art Theater repertory after only four performances.

The Heart of a Dog Another early work, The Heart of a Dog, is included among Bulgakov's most important. Considered one of Soviet Russia's best satirical novellas, the work portrays a scientist's transformation of a dog into a man. The creature develops reprehensible human qualities, and the scientist changes him back into the good-natured dog he once was. The story, which has obvious thematic parallels to "The Fatal Eggs," was never published in the Soviet Union because of its counterrevolutionary cast.

Critical reviews of the novella have been similar to those of "The Fatal Eggs." Some critics consider it a blatant political satire, equating the operation with the revolution, while others stress a moral and philosophical interpretation of the conflict between the intellectual scientist and the uneducated masses and of the disastrous results of interfering with a natural process.

The Master and Margarita Many critics have focused their attention on the meaning of The Master and Margarita. D. G. B. Piper examined the book in a 1971 article for the Forum for Modern Language Studies, giving a thorough explanation of the ways that death and murder wind through the story, tying it together, illuminating the differences between "the here-and-now and the ever-after."

In 1972 Pierre S. Hart interpreted the book in *Modern Fiction Studies* as a commentary on the creative process: "Placed in the context of the obvious satire on life in the early Soviet state," he wrote, "it gains added significance as a definition of the artist's situation in that system." While other writers saw the book as centering around the moral dilemma of Pilate or the enduring love of the Master and Margarita, Hart placed all of the book's events in relation to Soviet Russia's treatment of artists.

Edythe C. Haber, in the *Russia Review*, had yet another perspective on it in 1975, comparing the devil of Goethe's *Faust* with the devil as portrayed by Bulgakov. In the years since the Soviet Union was dismantled, the potency of *The Master and Margarita*'s glimpse into life in a totalitarian state has diminished somewhat, but

the book's mythic overtones are as strong as ever, making it a piece of literature that is every bit as, if not more, important than it was when it was new.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Study the treatment of writers in the Soviet Union in the 1930s through the 1960s. Report on the standards to which writers were held by the government and the punishments that were given to those who disobeyed.
- 2. Despite Bulgakov's politically unorthodox views and the censorship of his work, he enjoyed support during his lifetime from the Soviet establishment, particularly Joseph Stalin. Why do you think this was? Write an imaginary dialogue between Stalin and Bulgakov based on the phone call Stalin made denying Bulgakov the right to leave the country. What reasons do you think Stalin would have given, and how do you think Bulgakov would have reacted?
- 3. Read *Faust*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, which is openly acknowledged as one of the inspirations for *The Master and Margarita*. Compare Goethe's version of the devil with Bulgakov's Woland. Which do you think is more dangerous? Which is written to be the more sympathetic figure? Why do you think Bulgakov made the changes to the devil that he made?
- 4. How is oppression expressed throughout *The Master and Margarita*? What role does the devil play in commenting on Soviet oppression? Is oppression presented as a personal or impersonal force?

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Weeks, Laura D. "The Master and Margarita": A Critical Companion. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1996.

Basil Bunting

BORN: 1900, Scotswood, Northumberland,

England

DIED: 1985, Hexham, Northumberland,

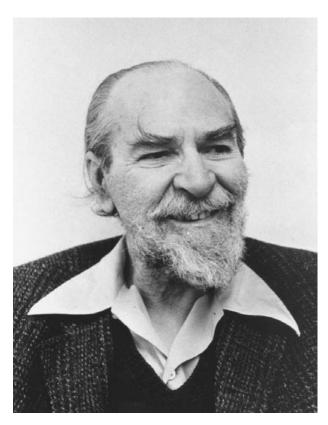
England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: *Poetry* MAJOR WORKS:

Redimiculum Matellarum (1930)

Poems, 1950 (1950) Briggflatts (1966)



Basil Bunting Bunting, Basil, photograph by Thomas Victor. Copyright © 1986 by Thomas Victor. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the Estate of Thomas Victor.

Overview

An innovative poet of the modernist movement, Basil Bunting is perhaps best remembered for *Briggflatts* (1966) and other long poems in which he attempted to duplicate musical forms. These highly allusive works, which Bunting termed "sonatas," reflect modernist and objectivist beliefs that poetry must convey emotion through sound. While his *Collected Poems* (1968; expanded, 1978) preserves a relatively small body of work, most critics concur with Tom Scott's assessment: "Bunting stands apart, one of very few dedicated poets of incorruptible integrity of purpose and talent, a subtle and original craftsman of consummate technical skill."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Prison and Music Educated in English Quaker schools, Bunting contends that his commitment to the craft of poetry dates back to his early childhood. In 1918, toward the end of World War I, Bunting turned eighteen and was therefore eligible to be drafted into military service. As a pacifist opposed to the use of violence, he applied for status as a conscientious objector to the war; he was one of approximately sixteen thousand British

citizens who protested the war in this way. This resulted in Bunting's imprisonment for more than a year. It was after Bunting's release from prison in 1919 that he began to pursue his poetic career. Following his release, he traveled extensively. In 1922, he met Ezra Pound in Paris. Two years later, Pound started Bunting's literary career by introducing him to Ford Madox Ford. Bunting secured a job as subeditor at Ford's *Transatlantic Review* in Paris and, later, became a music critic for the *Outlook*. It was during this time as a music editor that Bunting honed his knowledge of that art, a knowledge that would serve him well when he was writing his sonatas.

Collaborating with Ezra Pound Critics note that Bunting's early poems display the influence of T. S. Eliot, Louis Zukofsky, and Pound, all of whom experimented with musical forms in literature. Bunting's first collection, Redimiculum Matellarum (1930), was privately printed in Italy, where both he and Pound resided and collaborated on various projects. Redimiculum Matellarum contains "Villon," the first of Bunting's sonatas, which, like Eliot's Waste Land, was edited by Pound. In "Villon," Bunting uses a shifting point of view, with some sections narrated from that of the fifteenth-century poet François Villon and a contemporary narrator whose life at times parallels both Bunting's and Villon's: they all spent time in prison. Subsequent poems by Bunting from this period appear in the Active Anthology, which he edited with Pound, and in Louis Zukofsky's Objectivist Anthology.

Although Bunting was able to support himself in part while in Italy by writing articles for newspapers and magazines, the rising cost of living eventually forced him to leave for the Canary Islands at the end of 1933. Bunting and his family, which included two young daughters, stayed in the Canary Islands until several days before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Bunting's experiences while living in the Canary Islands were transformed into "The Well of Lycopolis." This gloomy sonata was written in 1935, but it did not appear in print until it was published in *Poems*, 1950. It is the last of Bunting's sonatas written prior to World War II.

Persian Influence In 1940 Bunting enlisted in the Royal Air Force and was stationed in Persia. After the war, he held several government and military positions, traveling extensively, with a prolonged stay in Iran. Although he published little new poetry during this time, Bunting's experiences provided the subject matter that informs much of his later verse and furnished him with extensive knowledge of Persian languages and culture. Bunting evidences this understanding in the lyrical "Odes" from *Poems*, 1950 and in *The Spoils* (1965).

Originally published in 1951 in *Poetry* magazine, *The Spoils* is the least musical of Bunting's sonatas and reflects his belief that Western civilization would benefit greatly from an understanding of Eastern culture. Bunting was trying to show that the priorities that Westerners value and assume are universal, including physical comfort, are

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bunting's famous contemporaries include:

Ezra Pound (1885–1972): This American expatriate poet made a major contribution to the modernist movement of the twentieth century, both in his own poetry and in his crucial editing of the works of T. S. Eliot and others.

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945): Prime minister of Italy in 1922, fortieth president of the Council of Ministers of Italy, and leader of the National Fascist Party, Mussolini was killed while trying to escape to Spain at the end of World War II.

Nina Hamnett (1890–1966): Known to many as the Queen of Bohemia, this Welsh painter, illustrator, and writer remains notorious for her flamboyant and unconventional lifestyle.

Louis Zukofsky (1904–1978): American poet and founder of the objectivist school of modernist poetry who worked closely with Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and others to promote techniques of modernism. A friend and mentor to Bunting, he corresponded frequently with Bunting and provided him with positive reviews.

Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982): After Joseph Stalin, Brezhnev was the longest-serving general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Chilean poet, essayist, and politician, Neruda was one of the most influential and significant literary figures of the twentieth century. A passionate Communist, Neruda was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971, despite his political commitments.

not necessarily shared by other cultures. The work shows that other priorities are valued in the East and that perhaps this Eastern set of attitudes toward life may allow humankind to appreciate its existence and its significance in a fuller and richer manner.

Revival and Recognition During the 1960s, Bunting gave up writing and focused on his economic survival. His poetic output was nonexistent until a young Newcastle poet, Tom Pickard, persuaded Bunting to give readings of his poems. The readings inspired Bunting to come out of retirement and begin work on his major sonata, Briggflats (1966). The popularity of the sonata, both in England and America, permanently changed Bunting's status as an unknown and secured his reputation as an important modern poet. It is considered by many critics a landmark of twentieth-century poetry.

In the wake of Bunting's increased reputation, Fulcrum Press published a collected edition of his work in 1968 and a second edition and paperback version two years later. In 1978 Oxford University Press republished the *Collected Poems*, at which time four short works were added. Thus, the volume contains all of Bunting's work that he has chosen to preserve—six sonatas, forty-eight odes, fourteen short translations, and one long translation.

After teaching for a number of years, first at the University of California–Santa Barbara and then in a joint position at the universities of Durham and Newcastle, Bunting spent the final years of his life in increasing poverty. In 1984 he moved to Whitley Chapel, near Hexham, Northumberland, where he died the following year.

Works in Literary Context

It is exactly Bunting's stance as a distinctly British modernist that may mark his special achievement in modern poetry. The language used in Bunting's verse, particularly the verse written after 1950, is markedly different from that of the American modernists. Not only does it reveal an interest in etymology and the stresses of the Old Briton and Welsh languages, but it captures the flavor of a British perception of existence. There is in his poetry a loving attention to the details of language and place that distinguishes Bunting as a poet who was not merely born in England but whose work illuminates various aspects of the national character.

Sonatas Bunting was always concerned with adapting music to poetry. In fact, he suggested that his only unique contribution to poetry was his adaptation of the sonata form to a poetic structure. Bunting also suggested that readers look to his poetry only for its aural value and advised them to take pleasure in the sheer sound combinations his poems afford. G. S. Fraser notes in the *Times* Literary Supplement that the poet's work "is verse which is directly melodic, which seems to sing rather than speak," adding, "Bunting perhaps excels all living poets in expressing emotional complexity through apparently simple—not so very simple—melodic artifice." And Anthony Suter extends this musical metaphor in Agenda, observing that Bunting's poetry reflects "the structure of meanings, and, moreover, the meanings are organized according to a musical architecture—that of sonata form."

Yet, it may well be his imaginative range and control that stand out most clearly when one attempts to assess the value of his work. Bunting's themes are essentially universal: the relationship of life and art, of past and present, of ideal form and physical manifestation, of memory and artifact, of love and human existence. His manipulation of these thematic concerns—the way he interweaves them throughout his poetic canon and ties them to specific locales in his sonatas—shows a man whose mind truly controls the verse he creates out of his experience of reality. Bunting's struggle with memory and regret, among other great themes, cannot help but

elicit a response in his audience, even if what they hear is primarily, as he feared and hoped, only a "pattern of sound that may sometimes...be pleasing."

Works in Critical Context

Above all, Basil Bunting was a poet of sounds. His achievements lie not only in the way he controls and uses language, but also in the way his poetry captures a particular time and place. Bunting perceives the presence of the past in the present. Throughout his work, there is a continual growth in mastery of the poetic line, in manipulation of varied thematic material, and in the handling of increasingly larger and more cohesive forms.

Briggflatts In Bunting's final sonata, Briggflatts, he brings his musical poetry to fruition. Described by August Kleinzahler as "the finest long poem of the century," Briggflatts displays a pastoral sensibility within a framework that is characteristically erudite and musical. Although subtitled "An Autobiography," this work focuses on Bunting's impressions of his experiences and his lifetime of studying literature rather than rendering actual occurrences in his life. The greatest achievement of Briggflatts is perhaps the way in which it returns to and musically updates the Quaker influences of Bunting's childhood, transforming these from the specific tenets of a particular religion to a music of the soul available to all.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Comment on Ezra Pound's role in introducing Bunting to readers. Research Pound's editing and promotion of T. S. Eliot and other authors and consider what role an editor can or should play in the writing and publishing of poetry. What do you make of Pound's heavy editorial hand?
- 2. Bunting was adamant that sound was the most important thing about poetry. In a short essay, take a position on lyrical poetry. Explain your view in contrast to or in support of Bunting's opinion. Structure your response with reference to three to five of Bunting's poems.
- 3. Read "The Spoils" and write a critical review, commenting on its message and lyrical qualities.
- 4. Bunting's renewed interest in writing poetry began after several readings. Prepare an oral reading of *Brigoflatts*. As a class, discuss why this poem received such high acclaim.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

While writing "The Spoils," Bunting indicated to his friend Louis Zukofsky that his theme contrasts Eastern and Western values. Other works that consider apparent distinctions between Eastern and Western cultures include:

Orientalism (1978), a nonfiction book by Palestinian American Edward Said. This text is a high-water mark for the postcolonial movement in literary studies.

Anti-Goeze (1778), a nonfiction collection by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. These nonfiction articles advocate tolerance for world religions.

Mountains and Rivers without End (1996), a poem by Gary Snyder. This epic poem reflects a vision of being in the world that is directly and overtly influenced by Snyder's travels and Eastern philosophy.

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■ John Bunyan

BORN: 1628, Elstow, England DIED: 1688, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Some Gospel-Truths Opened According to the Scriptures (1656)

A Few Sighs from Hell; or, The Groans of a Damned Soul (1658)

A New and Useful Concordance to the Holy Bible (1672)

The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come (1678)

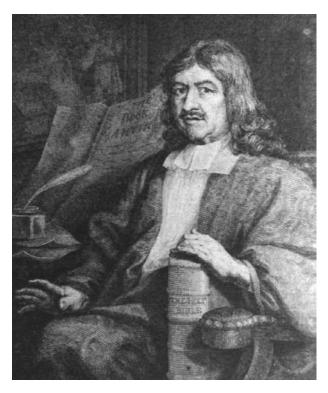
The Life and Death of Mr. Badman (1680)

Overview

The English author and Baptist preacher John Bunyan is recognized as a master of allegorical prose, and his art is often compared in conception and technique to that of John Milton and Edmund Spenser. Although he wrote nearly fifty works, he is chiefly remembered for *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* (1678), which, translated into numerous foreign languages and dialects, has long endured as a classic in world literature. While structured from a particular religious point of view, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has drawn both ecclesiastical and secular audiences of all ages and has enjoyed a worldwide exposure and popularity second only to the Bible.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Humble Upbringing and Service in the English Civil War John Bunyan was born in 1628 in Elstow, England, near Bedford, to Thomas Bunyan and his sec-



John Bunyan Bunyan, John, painting. The Library of Congress.

ond wife, Margaret Bentley Bunyan. Not much is known about the details of Bunyan's life; his autobiographical memoir, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), is concerned with life events only as they relate to his own spiritual experience. His family was humble though not wholly impoverished, and after learning to read at a grammar school he became a tinker, a sort of wandering junkman, like his father.

The year 1644, when Bunyan was sixteen, proved shockingly eventful. Within a few months his mother and sister died, his father married for the third time, and Bunyan was drafted into the Parliamentary Army fighting against the Royalist cause in the English Civil War. The English Civil War occurred when conflicts between leaders of the English Parliament and the reigning monarch, Charles I, led to the execution of the king in 1649 and the institution of a commonwealth run by Parliamentarian and Puritan Oliver Cromwell. By 1660, however, Charles II—the heir to the English throne who had been living in exile—was brought back to England and restored as its ruler in an event known as the Restoration.

During the English Civil War, Bunyan did garrison duty for three years. He never saw combat, from which he seems to have thought himself providentially spared, because, as he reports, a soldier who was sent in his place to a siege was killed. Nothing more is known about Bunyan's military service, but his exposure to Puritan ideas and preaching presumably dates from this time.

Conversion Experience The central event in Bunyan's life, as he describes it in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, was his religious conversion. This was both preceded and followed by extreme psychic torment. Under the influence of his first wife (whose name is not known) Bunyan began to read works of popular piety and to attend services regularly in Elstow Church. At this point he was still a member of the Church of England, in which he had been baptized.

One Sunday, however, while playing a game called "cat" on the village green, he was suddenly stopped by an inner voice that demanded, "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?" Since Puritans were bitterly opposed to participation in Sunday sports, Bunyan saw the occasion of this intervention as no accident; his conduct thereafter was "Puritan" in two essential respects. First, he wrestled inwardly with guilt and self-doubt. Second, he based his religion upon the Bible rather than upon traditions or ceremonies.

For years afterward, he would hear specific scriptural texts in his head, some threatening damnation and others promising salvation. Suspended between the two, Bunyan came close to despair, and his anxiety was reflected in physical as well as mental suffering. At last, he happened to overhear a group of old women, sitting in the sun, speak eloquently of their own abject unworthiness. This gave him the sudden realization that those who feel their guilt most deeply have been most chosen by God for

special attention. Like St. Paul and like many other Puritans, he would proclaim himself the "chief of sinners" and thereby declare himself one of those destined for Heaven.

While he was never wholly free from inner conflict, Bunyan's gaze from that point on was directed outward rather than inward, and he soon gained a considerable local reputation as a preacher and spiritual counselor. In 1653 he joined the Baptist congregation of John Gifford in Bedford. Gifford was a remarkable pastor who greatly assisted Bunyan's progress toward spiritual stability and encouraged him to speak to the congregation. After Gifford's death in 1655 Bunyan began to preach in public, and his sermons were so energetic that he gained the nickname "Bishop Bunyan." Among Puritan sects, the Bedford Baptists were more moderate and peaceful in their attitude.

Imprisonment Bunyan's first published work, Some Gospel-Truths Opened (1656), was an attack on the Quakers for their reliance on inner light rather than on the strict interpretation of Scripture. Above all Bunyan's theology asserted the helplessness of man unless assisted by the undeserved gift of divine grace. His inner experience and his theological position both encouraged a view of the self as the passive battleground of mighty forces, a fact which is of the first importance in considering the fictional narratives he went on to write.

Bunyan's wife died in 1658 and left four children, including a daughter who had been born blind and whose welfare remained a constant worry. Bunyan remarried the following year. It is known that his second wife was named Elizabeth, that she bore two children, and that she spoke eloquently on his behalf when he was in prison. The imprisonment is the central event of his later career: It was at once a martyrdom that he seems to have sought and a liberation from outward concerns that inspired him to write literary works. Once the Stuart monarchy had been reestablished in 1660 under Charles II, it was illegal for anyone to preach who was not an ordained clergyman in the Church of England. Bunyan spent most of the next twelve years in Bedford Jail because he would not give up preaching, although the confinement was not difficult and he was out on parole on several occasions. In 1672, the political situation changed when Charles II issued a Declaration of Indulgence that allowed for greater religious freedom. Except for a six-month return to prison in 1677, Bunyan was relatively free to travel and preach, which he did with immense energy and good will. Bunyan's principal fictional works were published during this post-imprisonment period and included the two parts of The Pilgrim's Progress in 1678 and 1684, The Life and Death of Mr. Badman in 1680, and The Holy War in 1682.

Bunyan died in 1688 after catching cold while riding through a rainstorm on a journey to reconcile a quarreling family. He was buried at the Nonconformist cemetery

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Bunyan's famous contemporaries include:

John Owen (1616–1683): An influential Puritan theologian, he wrote condemnations of the state of the English Church and supported other radical religious thinkers, going so far as to bail Bunyan out of jail.

Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658): The preeminent military leader during the English Civil War, Cromwell went on to become head of state (called the "Lord Protector") after the execution of Charles I.

Charles II (1630–1685): King of England after the collapse of Cromwell's government, and monarch during the Restoration

Samuel Pepys (1633–1703): English Parliamentarian and naval administrator best remembered today for his famous diary, which he kept from 1660 to 1669 and which covers events such as the Great Plague and Great Fire of London.

of Bunhill Fields in London. By 1692 a folio edition of his works had been published, together with a biographical sketch that includes this portrait: "As for his person he was tall of stature, strong boned though not corpulent, somewhat of a ruddy face, with sparkling eyes, wearing his hair on his upper lip after the old British fashion; his hair reddish, but in his latter days time had sprinkled it with grey; his nose well set, but not declining or bending; and his mouth moderate large, his forehead something high, and his habit always plain and modest."

Works in Literary Context

Once Bunyan was able to preach freely, he infused his works with a sense of authority. He no longer prefaced them with apologies for his limitations, and he began to address his readers more in fatherly than brotherly fashion, as is clearly evidenced in his spiritual autobiography, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. When he was sent back to prison after the Declaration of Indulgence was withdrawn and the persecution of religious dissenters resumed, Bunyan began his first religious allegory, The Pilgrim's Progress. Specific incidents in The Pilgrim's Progress were borrowed directly from the Scriptures as well as from numerous secular and less edifying works available to Bunyan. But generations of critics have testified to Bunyan's own comprehensive scope, rich characterization, and genuine spiritual torment and joy drawn from personal experience. Thus, autobiography and allegory serve as two main themes running through his major works.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

John Bunyan was neither the first nor the last author to use allegory to communicate his religious thoughts. Here are some other famous allegories:

Unto This Last (1860), an allegory by John Ruskin. A Victorian author, poet, and artist, Ruskin was also an influential religious thinker. In this work he lays down theories that would prove highly influential to left-wing Christian socialist thought.

The Divine Comedy (1308–1321), an epic poem by Dante Alighieri. Perhaps the best-known religious allegory, this fourteenth-century poem describes the author's journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven.

The Chronicles of Narnia (1949–1954), a series of novels by C. S. Lewis. Although these tales can be read simply as children's fantasy literature, Lewis purposely wove a deeper layer of Christian allegory into his stories as well.

Spiritual Autobiography Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, a relatively short narrative of about a hundred pages, stands unchallenged as the finest achievement in the Puritan genre of spiritual autobiography. Its origins lie in the personal testimony that each new member was required to present before being admitted to the Bedford congregation, and Bunyan's allusions to St. Paul in the preface suggest that he intended the published work as a kind of modern-day Epistle for the encouragement of believers. Determined to tell his story exactly, Bunyan promises to "be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was." What follows is a deeply moving account of inner torment, in which God and Satan vie for possession of the anguished sinner by causing particular Biblical texts to come into his head; Bunyan exclaims grimly, "Woe be to him against whom the Scriptures bend themselves."

Religious Allegory The Pilgrim's Progress records in allegorical form the author's spiritual awakening and growth. An allegory is a story in which abstract ideas, such as Love or Hope, appear as concrete things or characters. The idea of human life as a pilgrimage was not new in Bunyan's time; its story elements stretched back to even such adventurous journeys as The Odyssey, and its popularity was further intensified with the chivalric romances of the Middle Ages. For generations, the virtues and vices had been personified; those peopling the Christian's difficult road to spiritual salvation—many who assist him when he is beset by obstacles and others who are the obstacles themselves—were familiar story elements to Bunyan's first readers.

The Life and Death of Mr. Badman and The Holy War, while not as celebrated as Bunyan's renowned allegory, are works equally representative of the author's spiritual concerns, albeit from different perspectives. The first is a dialog between Mr. Wiseman, Bunyan's fictional counterpart, and his faithful disciple, Attentive, who discuss the degeneracy of Mr. Badman as it progresses from youthful vices to misspent and miserable adulthood. The Holy War, like The Pilgrim's Progress, is an allegorical depiction of spiritual struggle but, rather than employing the metaphor of quest or journey, it makes the human soul itself a bastion besieged by evil forces. The Holy War chronicles the original fall of humanity, the personal acceptance of salvation through Christ, the falling away after conversion, and ultimate restitution; on a more personal level, it also stresses the lifelong vigilance against sin that each person must wage.

Works in Critical Context

Generations of critics have testified to Bunyan's own comprehensive scope, rich characterization, and genuine spiritual torment and joy drawn from personal experience. Charles Doe, one of Bunyan's contemporaries, remarked: "What hath the devil, or his agents, gotten by putting our great gospel minister Bunyan, in prison? For in prison he wrote many excellent books, that have published to the world his great grace, and great truth, and great judgment, and great ingenuity; and to instance in one, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, he hath suited to the life of a Christian, that this very book, besides the rest, hath done the superstitious sort of men more good than if he had been let alone at his meeting at Bedford, to preach the gospel to his own [audience]."

The Pilgrim's Progress Although individual critical interpretations and appraisals of his writings have varied over time, the popularity and relevance of Bunyan's work, most notably of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, remain undiminished today. James Anthony Froude affirmed:

It has been the fashion to dwell on the disadvantages of his education, and to regret the carelessness of nature which brought into existence a man of genius in a tinker's hut at Elstow.... Circumstances, I should say, qualified Bunyan perfectly well for the work, which he had to do.... He was born to be the Poet-apostle of the English middle classes, imperfectly educated like himself; and, being one of themselves, he had the key of their thoughts and feelings in his own heart....[His] mental furniture was gathered at first hand from his conscience, his life, and his occupations. Thus, every idea which he received falling into a soil naturally fertile, sprouted up fresh, vigorous, and original.

Responses to Literature

1. What are Bunyan's major themes? How does he express those themes through allegory?

- 2. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian and Christiana are the allegorical stand-ins for Christian men and women, respectively. How do these two characters' struggles differ, and what does that have to say about Bunyan's views of men and women and their relationship to Christianity?
- 3. In your opinion, exactly how much progress does the pilgrim Christian make over the course of his journey? In what aspects does he evolve the most as a person?
- 4. How do you think Bunyan felt about the religious experience? Did he view it as an individual experience or a group experience? Research the Puritan movement and describe how Bunyan's views fit into it.
- 5. What are Bunyan's "stumbling blocks"? What other allegorical obstacles to Christian virtue can you think of from other stories or legends?

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Anthony Burgess

BORN: 1917, Manchester, England DIED: 1993, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Long Day Wanes: A Malayan Trilogy (1956–1959)

A Clockwork Orange (1962)

The Wanting Seed (1962) Inside Mr. Enderby (1963) Earthly Powers (1980)

Overview

Anthony Burgess was a prolific literary figure of the twentieth century, producing a large number of novels, plays, biographies, screenplays, critical essays, and articles on an extensive array of topics. Trained in music and interested in linguistics, Burgess frequently applied this knowledge to his writing; his fascination with language is apparent in his best-known novel, *A Clockwork Orange*. Burgess often examined the conflict between free will and determinism through fictional worlds that are in disarray. Although Burgess remained pessimistic about the state of modern society, critics generally agree that his inventive humor and wordplay tempered his cynicism.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Catholic Upbringing John Anthony Burgess Wilson was born in Manchester, England, on February 25, 1917. His father, Joseph Wilson, played piano in movie houses and pubs, and his mother, Elizabeth (née Burgess), was a music hall singer who died in the influenza epidemic following World War I when Burgess was a toddler. He was raised Roman Catholic, attending Bishop Bilsborough



Anthony Burgess Burgess, Anthony, photograph. AP Images.

Memorial School and Xavierian College, Manchester, but identified himself as a "lapsed Catholic." One unquestionable legacy from his Catholic upbringing was a fervent belief in Original Sin, or the idea that all humankind is marked by the sins committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

From Music to Literature Although Burgess wrote poetry from an early age, he aspired to a career in music. Unable to earn a scholarship at the University of Manchester, he had to work to save enough money to continue his education, and then, having failed to pass an entrance examination in physics, Burgess had to resign himself to a degree in English literature and linguistics. Burgess was called into service by the British army in the fall of 1940. World War II had begun in Europe in 1939, after Nazi troops from Germany invaded Poland. England, as a key member of the Allied powers opposed to Germany's actions, called upon all its able men to help repel the German forces. Burgess, after serving with a group of professional entertainers, was sent to Gibraltar, where he remained from 1943 to 1946 doing intelligence work.

At Manchester University, he met Llewela Jones, whom he married on January 23, 1942. While Burgess was in Gibraltar, his wife, pregnant with their first child, did volunteer work in England. At the time, many cities in England undertook nighttime blackouts in order to prevent German bombers from finding targets during night raids. Returning home in the dark of the blackouts one night, Llewela was attacked by four American soldiers intent on robbing her. This event planted the seed for A Clockwork Orange. Burgess's wife was so badly shaken by the effort to keep her wedding ring that she miscarried. The miscarriage caused the chronic hemorrhaging that, as Burgess told C. Robert Jennings in Playboy, contributed to his wife's alcoholism and her 1968 death from cirrhosis.

A Menger Living Following his return to England in 1946, Burgess eked out a living by playing the piano and by teaching. In 1949, he drew upon his wartime experience to write A Vision of Battlements. Burgess sent his manuscript to Heinemann because of that publishing house's affiliation with Graham Greene, a contemporary of Burgess's. He was told, however, that A Vision of Battlements was a "second novel" and that he needed to write a first. Heinemann also turned down the manuscript of what Burgess submitted as the "first" novel, eventually published as The Worm and the Ring (1961).

Discouraged by his lack of money, Burgess accepted a teaching position in Malaya (which at the time was a protectorate of the United Kingdom). In Malaya he began to concentrate on fiction rather than music, although he never abandoned music completely. Burgess's first three published novels comprise the Malayan Trilogy (published in the United States as The Long Day Wanes: A Malayan Trilogy in 1964). These novels often

prove difficult for the Western reader, because, Burgess said, he had a Malayan audience in mind. Though his talent was acknowledged in the reviews of these first three books, he still considered himself a teacher.

"Death Sentence" In 1959, while giving a lecture in a Malaya classroom, Burgess collapsed and was flown to a hospital in London for examination and treatment. He was informed by British doctors that he had a brain tumor and would probably be dead within a year. Concerned about his wife's financial security, Burgess began writing as fast as he could, hoping that his work would make enough profit to support her after his death. One year and five manuscripts later, Burgess was alive in Sussex and continuing to write. Burgess later regarded his collapse as a "willed collapse out of sheer boredom and frustration" and claims to have found the year of his "death sentence" one of exhilaration rather than depression. Certainly it was a year of creative productivity.

In 1960 Burgess published *The Doctor Is Sick*, in which his movement toward fantasy is evident, and *The Right to an Answer*. In 1961 he published two more novels—*Devil of a State* and *One Hand Clapping*, a black comedy about the debilitating effects of television, published under the pseudonym Joseph Kell because his publisher was concerned that the novels would be undervalued if he were to acquire the reputation of being too prolific. The "Joseph Kell" books got few reviews and sold poorly, however, until they were republished under Burgess's name.

Also in the early 1960s he fell in love with translator Liliana Marcellari, and in August 1964 their son, Andreas, was born (though Burgess was still married to Llewela Jones at the time). In October 1968, after the death of Llewela, Burgess and Marcellari were married. After he changed publishers from Heinemann to Jonathan Cape, Burgess and his family left England for Malta, then Italy and Monaco.

Notoriety The book that brought him the greatest fame—and, according to its author, the greatest irritation—was the 1962 novel *A Clockwork Orange*. Burgess indicated several events that led to his writing the now classic work. First was a report he had read about American prisons using "behaviorist methods of reforming criminals...with the avowed purpose of limiting the subjects' freedom of choice to what society called 'goodness,'" according to Aggeler. Second was a trip he and his wife had taken to the Soviet Union, during which they had encountered a group of marauding thugs who maintained a kind of honor code. Last was the 1943 attack on his wife when she was pregnant.

Besides the shocking portrayal of violence, A Clockwork Orange garnered immediate attention for its use of the language Nadsat, a construction in which he combined Cockney slang and Russian. Notoriety of the work increased when celebrated filmmaker Stanley Kubrick directed the motion picture A Clockwork Orange from a

screenplay he adapted in 1971. The film was a stylish and deeply disturbing depiction of gang violence and moral depravity that quickly brought the novel millions of new readers but also brought Burgess the reputation of seeming to "celebrate" violence. This impression is exacerbated by the truncated ending of both the film and the American printing of the book, in which the final chapter which shows the main character Alex growing weary of violence as he begins to mature—was left out completely. When actual acts of violence were traced back to the movie-for instance, Arthur Bremer's attempt on presidential candidate George Wallace's life in 1972—Burgess tried to disown the novel, in part because it had become associated with the adaptation but also because he had become known only as the author of A Clockwork Orange.

New Literary Directions Burgess's frustration with being accused of triggering acts of violence resulted in his writing the novel *The Clockwork Testament, or, Enderby's End* (1974). In addition to attacking such targets as American academics and their students, television talkshow hosts, and feminists, the novel rebukes the critics who blamed his art for precipitating violence.

In his last years, Burgess continued writing prolifically, his output including two volumes of his autobiography, *Little Wilson and Big God* (1986) and *You've Had Your Time* (1990). The first volume covers his life until his "death sentence." The second volume covers his life until 1982. After publishing three more novels and a short-story collection, he died of cancer on November 22, 1993.

Works in Literary Context

A New Take on Science Fiction Burgess's fiction does not fit comfortably in the fantasy and science fiction genre. With the possible exception of The End of the World News, his science fiction is not the science fiction of Arthur C. Clarke or Isaac Asimov, who had designs for a futuristic world brought into being by science and technology. Unlike Asimov, Burgess had little background in science, and like Doris Lessing, he had little inclination to read about it.

Burgess himself consistently rejected such a designation and played down the science fiction aspects of his novels. He argued that A Clockwork Orange, for example, is set in an England of a quite near future, not the distant one of Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932), or perhaps even George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949). Furthermore, in a work such as The End of the World News, part of which is unarguably science fiction, Burgess offers a highly ambivalent characterization of Valentine Brodie, who teaches and writes in the genre. Nevertheless, Burgess has been considered a writer of science fiction for A Clockwork Orange, a contemporary classic, and for The Wanting Seed (1962), 1985, and The End of the World News.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Burgess's famous contemporaries include:

William S. Burroughs (1914–1997): This American avant-garde writer was one of the central members of the Beat Generation.

Graham Greene (1904–1991): A widely popular English novelist, essayist, short-story writer, and playwright, Greene was instrumental in the support of many fellow writers

Stanley Kubrick (1928–1999): Kubrick was an esteemed American filmmaker and director who is perhaps best known for his science fiction classics *A Clockwork Orange* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Doris Lessing (1919–): English author of *The Grass Is* Singing and *The Golden Notebook* who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007.

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953): Communist leader and dictator of the Soviet Union from 1922–1953.

The Artist's Role in Society Geoffrey Aggeler, writing in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, considered the novels Burgess wrote during his "terminal year" representative of the "themes which he was to develop again and again in the course of the next twenty years—the role and situation of the artist vis-a-vis an impinging world, love and decay in the West, the quest for a darker culture...."

In a series of humorous novels featuring F. X. Enderby, a moderately successful poet whom some critics view as Burgess's alter ego, Burgess seriously examines the role of the artist in contemporary society. While the middle-aged Enderby is portrayed as an immature individual who can write only in the privacy of his bathroom, the poetry he produces is regarded highly by those few people who still read poetry. Burgess intended for Inside Mr. Enderby to be "a kind of trumpet blast on behalf of the besieged poet of today—the man who tries to be independent, tries to write his poetry not on the campus, but in the smallest room in the house where he can have some privacy," wrote Aggeler. When two Enderby books were released in America as a single volume, Burgess considered it "the book in which I say most, mean most to myself about the situation of the artist."

The Nature of Good, Evil, and Free Will In Earthly Powers, a novel dense with themes relating to philosophy and theology, Burgess examines the nature of good and evil and the concept of free will. This novel follows the destinies of a homosexual British novelist and a charismatic Italian cleric through world events spanning fifty years of the twentieth century. As participants and

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who, like Burgess, have presented a dark view of the future:

Brave New World (1932), a novel by Aldous Huxley. In this novel of futuristic medical and other technologies, several developments—sleep-learning, test-tube cloning—drive the storyline.

The Birthday of the World (2003), a short-story collection by Ursula K. Le Guin. A collection of short stories by a master of futuristic fiction, this book explores themes such as gender segregation, marriage between four people, and the disruption of a society whose rulers are "God."

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood. In this dystopian novel, Canadian author Atwood speculates on a horrifying future of gender division, reproductive control, and Communist takeover by the elite.

observers of human cruelty and degradation, both characters conclude that God has created evil to preserve humanity's freedom of choice. This same theme lies at the core of *A Clockwork Orange*. Alex, the hoodlum who joyously partakes in violent criminal outbursts, has his free will taken away by the Ludovico treatment he undergoes. The question the author poses is this: Can someone be considered "good" simply because he is no longer physically able to do bad things?

Works in Critical Context

A *London Times* obituarist commented on Burgess's literary impact:

When some future Burgess a century from now comes to write the cultural history of the second half of the 20th century, Burgess will be recognised as a giant in his tattered humanity and his intolerable wrestle with words and meanings.... He enriched his generation more than most, and left a body of work to keep readers arguing and delighted as long as reading survives, and civilisation does not fall into one of his own nightmare visions.

Critical assessment of Burgess ranges from the ecstatic to the offended, for Burgess pulled few punches as a writer. The American writer Gore Vidal observed in the New York Review of Books that Burgess was "easily the most interesting English writer of the last half century." In a review of a later collection of essays, critic Michael Dirda observed in Washington Post Book World that Burgess's "knowledge of literary, linguistic and musical arcana rivals that of any Oxford don; he writes

with a lyrical verve; and he seems willing to turn his hand to anything whatever."

Earthly Powers Despite the commercial success of other novels, it is Earthly Powers that is considered Burgess's masterpiece. The novel is an autobiography of the octogenarian playwright Kenneth M. Toomey, an amalgam of the writers Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, W. Somerset Maugham, and Burgess himself. Though it is a long book, many critics found its message undiluted by its length. "The book is ruthlessly well organized—there is no point at which the reader feels [Burgess] is not getting on with it and no incident or character not in place by design," lauded London Times reviewer Michael Ratcliffe. "[It] is a hellfire tract thrown down by a novelist at the peak of his powers who cannot forbear to invent, divert, embellish and dazzle us the entire length of the way." Geoffrey Aggeler, too, found Earthly Powers unhindered by its length. "Enormous in scope, encompassing much of twentieth-century social, literary, and political history, it inevitably has some flaws....[They] are, however, minor and unavoidable in a work so large and ambitious. Overall it is a magnificent performance."

Responses to Literature

- Burgess entered a period of incredible productivity after he was given what he considered a "death sentence" by doctors following a collapse while teaching. What would you do if you had one year to live? Write a to-do list for your one remaining year of life.
- 2. The setting for A Clockwork Orange is a dystopian society. Look up "dystopia" in the dictionary. What are some of its elements of dystopia present in A Clockwork Orange? Does the United States of today share any of these elements? Are there ways in which the United States can be described as a dystopia? Provide examples.
- 3. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about behavior-modification techniques in eliminating unwanted behavior. Do you think these techniques are practical solutions for violent criminals like Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*?

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Frances Hodgson Burnett

BORN: 1849, Manchester, England
DIED: 1924, New York, United States
NATIONALITY: British, American

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Little Lord Fauntleroy (1886)

A Little Princess (1905)

The Secret Garden (1911)

Overview

British-born author Frances Hodgson Burnett is chiefly remembered for her book *The Secret Garden* (1911), one of the classics of children's literature. Her biggest contemporary success, however, was *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), though the story is now considered less significant for its literary merits than for its representation of the sentimental Victorian ideal of childhood. Although Burnett wrote for the adult marketplace at least as much as for the juvenile, her reputation rests firmly on her achievements as a children's writer.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Difficult Childhood in England Born Frances Eliza Hodgson on November 24, 1849, in Manchester, England, she was the third of five children of Edwin Hodgson and Eliza Boond Hodgson. Her father operated a furniture store in the city, a center of Britain's Industial Revolution in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He died when Frances was four



Frances Hodgson Burnett Popperfoto / Getty Images

years old. Her mother tried to maintain the family store, but by 1865, Manchester's economy, which depended primarily on textiles, had become undone by the interruption of cotton imports from the United States during the American Civil War. During that war, the Union navy blockaded the southern states and prevented them from exporting their main cash crop: cotton. The Hodgsons were devasted financially. Looking for a better life, the family immigrated to the United States and settled near Knoxville, Tennessee, where Frances's uncle lived.

In her mid-teens, Frances began publishing stories in women's magazines to help support her family. Such publications offered women writers a chance to publish at a time when it was difficult for them to establish literary careers. Throughout the remainder of the 1860s, such was her popularity that she was published in nearly every popular American magazine. In 1871, Burnett was first published in a more overtly literary publication, *Scribner's Monthly*, and, in 1873, her first novel, *Dolly: A Love Story* (also known as *Vagabondia*), was serialized. The family became increasingly dependent on Frances's income following her mother's death in 1872.

Marriage and Writing Success In the early 1870s, Frances visited England for a year. Upon returning to the United States in 1873, she married a Tennessee doctor,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Burnett's famous contemporaries include:

Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888): American novelist and abolitionist; best known for her novel *Little Women*.

Crazy Horse (c. 1842–1877): Lakota Indian warrior; fought against U.S. general George Custer in the Great Sioux War in 1876–1877, ending in Crazy Horse's surrender and death.

Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria (1863–1914): Heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne; assassinated with his wife in Serbia in 1914, which led to the start of World War I.

Thomas Lipton (1848–1931): Scottish grocer and entrepreneur; bought tea plantations in India and established the Lipton tea brand.

Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893): French novelist and writer; considered one of the creators of the modern short story.

Swan Burnett, and the next year—after Burnett gave birth to Lionel, the first of their two children—the family moved to Paris, where Burnett's husband pursued his interest in ophthalmology. Burnett continued to publish in American magazines as a secondary means of income for her family. In 1876, after Burnett gave birth to her second son, Vivian, the family returned to the United States and settled in Washington, D.C., where Burnett's husband established a medical practice.

Throughout the remainder of the 1870s as the United States recovered from the Civil War, Burnett published several realist novels, including the previously serialized works *Dolly* and *That Lass o' Lowrie's* (1877), which took place in a British mining community. Perhaps the most artistically successful of these novels is *Through One Administration* (1881), in which an unhappily married woman finds herself frustrated by conventions and expectations while circulating among high society in Washington, D.C.

Increased Popularity with Children's Stories In 1879, Burnett also began publishing children's stories. Her first major success in this genre came with the publication of Little Lord Fauntleroy (1886). This book concerns a little boy, Cedric Fauntleroy, who is guided by his seemingly infallible sense of fair play. Burnett's novel became a runaway best seller in both England and the United States. It was translated into twelve languages and sold more than a million copies in English. Its success enabled Burnett to live independent of her husband, for their marriage had long been unhappy. However, its

success also branded Burnett as a popular and romantic writer rather than a serious novelist.

While on vacation abroad in 1887, Burnett discovered that E. V. Seebohm had written an unauthorized theatrical version of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. (International copyright was effectively nonexistent in the nineteenth century.) *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was a major source of income for Burnett, and though Seebohm offered a half share of the profits if she would authorize his version, Burnett instead wrote her own adaptation.

Sensation as a Playwright Seebohm's play went into production in London in February 1888; Burnett's did not open until May. In the meantime, she took legal action against her rival. The judicial verdict was in her favor and established a precedent effectively forbidding unauthorized dramatizations of an author's work. Burnett's victory was not only a legal one, however. When her The Real Little Lord Fauntleroy was performed, reviewers acknowledged its superiority to the "pseudo-Fauntleroy" of Seebohm, praising the artistry of Burnett's dramatic writing. During the late 1880s and into the 1890s, she enjoyed considerable success as a playwright, producing, for the most part, theatrical versions of her own stories.

In 1888, Burnett published another popular book for children, *Sara Crewe; or, What Happened at Miss Minchin's*, in which a young girl, the daughter of a supposedly rich businessman, falls into poverty after her father dies penniless. This story confirmed Burnett's growing stature as a masterly writer of children's literature.

Personal Tragedy Inspires Life and Work But Burnett's personal life became increasingly unhappy. She had separated from her husband, and her fifteen-year-old son, Lionel, fell ill with tuberculosis, then a common but usually fatal disease of the lungs. During most of 1890, Burnett traveled throughout Europe with her son, hoping in vain to find a treatment center that would cure him. Lionel died in Paris on December 7, 1890.

Following Lionel's death, Burnett threw herself into work for several children's charities, which made her more aware of the harsh fate of poor children in London. She also published two collections of stories—Giovanni and the Other (1892) and Piccino, and Other Child Stories (1895)—both of which featured many stories about dead or dying children, inspired by her grief over the loss of her son. Between these two books, Burnett published her childhood memoir, The One I Knew the Best of All: A Memory of the Mind of a Child (1893). Originally intended to be a brief sketch, it developed into a work for adults. Its comments upon Burnett's idea of childhood, and her memory of her own childhood psychology is illuminating for a study of her children's fiction. The memoir also emphasizes Burnett's lifelong obsession with gardens and the natural world.

Critically Dismissed Adult Fiction In the mid-1890s, Burnett resumed writing adult fiction, producing successful historical "costume dramas," such as A Lady of Quality (1896), In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim (1899), The Making of a Marchioness (1901), and The Methods of Lady Walderhurst (1901). The popular success of these works sealed Burnett's fate with the critics, who viewed her as a writer of third-rate potboilers who was no longer interested in attempting the serious social-realist mode that had earned praise in her early novels.

In 1898, Burnett was divorced from her husband. Two years later, she married her playwriting collaborator, Stephen Townesend. From the outset the marriage was a disaster, and the couple lived separately after 1902. Townesend died in 1914.

A Little Princess and The Secret Garden In 1905, Burnett became a naturalized U.S. citizen. That year also saw the publication of A Little Princess, a reworking of her story Sara Crewe. In this story, a young girl, reduced to poverty, uses the power of her imagination to transform her reality. A Little Princess won widespread favor, and it remains one of Burnett's most popular works.

Perhaps Burnett's most acclaimed work for children is *The Secret Garden* (1911), which has the rejuvenating nature of gardening as a theme and celebrates the power of imagination. With its vivid, convincing depiction of life—particularly childhood—*The Secret Garden* is widely considered Burnett's greatest work and a major contribution to the canon of children's literature.

While continuing to publish both children's books such as *The Little Hunchback Zia* (1916) and a number of critically dismissed adult novels such as *The Head of the House of Coombe* (1922) and its sequel *Robin* (1922), Burnett lived comfortably at her home on Long Island, New York. She died there in 1924.

Works in Literary Context

According to her autobiography, Burnett's imagination was stimulated by stories of adventure and romance she read as a child, such as ballads, biblical tales, and Roman histories. She was also influenced by the works of William Shakespeare, the Romantic poets, and novelists including Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, Mayne Reid, and Harrison Ainsworth.

Nature in Burnett's Work Like the English poet William Wordsworth, Burnett depicts nature as the great teacher of children, nurturing spiritual and emotional health. She described her own bliss in the gardens of her childhood and her feelings of entrapment in the crowded and lifeless environment of a large manufacturing city. In contrast, she recounts the flowering of her emotions and the liberation of her spirit in the wilderness of rural Tennessee.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Children's literature is a vast genre and includes many titles originally written for adults. Here are some classic works of "children's" literature.

Anne of Green Gables (1908), a novel by Lucy Maud Montgomery. A spunky adopted girl grows up and thrives in a farming community in rural Nova Scotia, Canada.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (1950), a novel by C. S. Lewis. The first novel in the Chronicles of Narnia series introduces the land of Narnia, ruled by the evil White Witch whom four human children must defeat to save the Narnia

The Little Prince (1943), a novel by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. This fable of an isolated prince who learns what love means was written by a French aviator who disappeared while flying over enemy territory during World War II.

The Once and Future King (1958), a novel by T. H. White. This story tells of the childhood and life of King Arthur and his betrayal by his favorite knight, Sir Lancelot. Treasure Island (1883), a novel by Robert Louis Stevenson. This adventure story featuring pirates and buried treas-

ure is based on actual facts.

If the house is a place of masculine rule, the garden is a place of maternal fertility and rebirth. The strong symbolic structures of *The Secret Garden* account for much of its emotional power as a narrative. The pattern of fall and redemption is associated with the biblical Fall of human-kind. The locked garden is a version of the Garden of Eden, representing a lost paradise of love and idyllic happiness. In the tradition of medieval romance, the walled garden (often a rose garden) symbolized love, female sexuality, and fertility. The secret garden was initially a garden of love, and it symbolically remains a feminine place, the place of the maternal spirit, to which females bring males to find healing.

Phyllis Bixler notes that Burnett's use of fairy tale and fantasy and her romantic idealization of the child are in harmony with a contemporary movement in children's fiction, seen, for example, in the work of Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald.

Works in Critical Context

Critical opinions about Burnett's adult fiction have labeled her as a second-rate "relic of Victorianism," increasingly irrelevant to a generation of readers in tune with twentieth-century modernism. However, her reputation as a children's writer remains undiminished—*The*

Secret Garden, in particular, is praised as a classic of the golden age of British children's literature.

Little Lord Fauntleroy In Little Lord Fauntleroy, as well as much of Burnett's early writing for children, the author often seems to be "talking to adults in the presence of children," in the words of Barbara Wall, rather than seeking to present a focus appropriate to a child reader. Though Little Lord Fauntleroy today is criticized for its sentimentality, contemporary reviews were admiring, stressing the appeal of the sentimental and romantic view of the child. That of the Manchester Guardian is typical: "Cedric's simple, truthful, earnest and loving nature is what one would like all children to have, for it was just the same with or without wealth, in the little house in New York or in the great castle."

The Secret Garden With its vivid, convincing depiction of life—particularly childhood—in all its moods and fluctuating facets, The Secret Garden is widely considered Burnett's greatest work and a major contribution to the canon of children's literature. Phyllis Bixler observed, "By offering a credible portrayal of changes within child... characters and by amplifying these changes through the use of pastoral images and themes, Burnett created a work which deserves its status as a juvenile masterpiece."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Studies show that being connected to the natural world can relieve stress and help concentration. How often are you outside for fun? What sorts of outside activities do you engage in on a regular basis? Write a brief essay describing one of these activities or an outside activity you would like to participate in, and how it contributes to your daily life.
- 2. Burnett went from being considered a "literary" writer to a "genre" writer, which is taken less seriously by literary critics. What do you think is the difference between "serious" fiction and popular fiction? Is one type necessarily better than the other?
- 3. Burnett emphasized the power of imagination in her books. What sorts of things do you think are important for children today to be aware of? Why?
- 4. Visit a local park, community garden, or botanical garden. Note how you feel before you go, during your time there, and afterward. Write a short essay describing the experience.
- 5. Do you think that imagination can help people transform their life? Write an essay arguing for or against this idea. If you disagree, what do you think is necessary instead?

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Robert Burns

BORN: 1759, Alloway, Ayrshire, Scotland

DIED: 1796, Dumfries, Scotland

NATIONALITY: Scottish

GENRE: *Poetry* MAJOR WORKS:

"Auld Lang Syne" (1788)

"The Battle of Sherramuir" (1790)

"Tam o' Shanter" (1791)

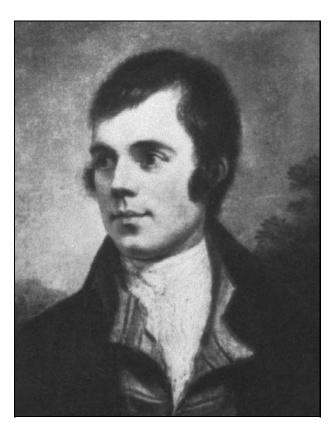
"A Red, Red Rose" (1794)

Overview

Poet Robert Burns recorded and celebrated aspects of farm life, regional experience, traditional culture, class culture and distinctions, and religious practice and belief in such a way as to transcend the specific nature of his inspiration, becoming finally the national poet of Scotland. Although he did not set out to achieve that designation, he clearly and repeatedly expressed his wish to be called a Scotch bard, to extol his native land in poetry and song.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Hard Work and Tragedy on Scottish Farms Born in Alloway, Ayrshire, Scotland on January 25, 1759, to impoverished tenant farmers, Burns received little formal schooling, although his father, William Burnes (whose



Robert Burns Burns, Robert, photograph. AP Images.

famous son later altered the spelling of the family name), sought to provide his sons with as much education as possible. He managed to employ a tutor for Robert and his brother Gilbert, and this, together with Burns's extensive reading, furnished the poet with an adequate grounding in English education. Burns's family moved from one rented farm to another during his childhood, enduring hard work and financial difficulties. As the family was too poor to afford modern farming implements, their hardships progressively worsened. All his efforts notwithstanding, William Burnes was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1783; his death followed soon afterward. Many biographers believe that watching his father slowly succumb to the ravages of incessant work and despair was a factor in Burns's later condemnation of social injustice.

A Lover of Women and Poetry While a young man, Burns acquired a reputation for charm and wit and began to indulge in romance. He once attributed the beginnings of his poetry to his sensuality: "There is certainly some connection between Love and Music and Poetry.... I never had the least thought or inclination of turning poet till I once got heartily in love, and then rhyme and song were, in a manner, the spontaneous language of my heart." Outspoken in matters religious as well as sexual, Burns was frequently involved in conflicts with the

church, both for his relationships with women and for his criticism of church doctrine. Throughout his life, Burns was fervently opposed to the strict Calvinism that prevailed in the Scottish Church. The doctrine of these Calvinists included a rigid conception of predestination—the belief that the soul's salvation was set at birth—and a belief in an arbitrarily chosen religious elite who were to attain salvation regardless of moral behavior. But although Burns was repelled by this, as well as by the Calvinist notion of humankind as innately and inevitably sinful, he was not irreligious; his theology has been summed up as a vague humanitarian deism, or belief in a distant and undefined God.

Short-Lived Fame In 1786, Burns proposed to Jean Armour, who was pregnant with his child. Her parents forbade the match but demanded financial support from Burns. Angry at this rejection by the Armours and hurt by what he deemed Jane's willingness to side with her parents, Burns resolved to sail to Jamaica to start a new life. The plan never materialized, however, for during that year his Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect was published in Kilmarnock. The volume catapulted Burns to sudden, remarkable, but short-lived, fame. Upon success of the book, he went to Edinburgh, where he was much admired by the local intellectual elite, though he afterward remained in relative obscurity for the rest of his life. In the meantime, he was still involved with Jean Armour, whom he was finally able to marry in 1788.

Back to the Hard Life Burns carried on his dual professions of poet and tenant farmer until the next year when he obtained a post in the excise service. Most of Burns's major poems, with the notable exception of "Tam o' Shanter," had been written by this point in his life. The latter part of his creative career was devoted to collecting and revising the vast body of existing Scottish folk songs. In 1796, at the age of thirty-seven, Burns died from rheumatic heart disease, apparently caused by excessive physical exertion and frequent undernourishment as a child.

Works in Literary Context

Through his treatment of such themes as the importance of freedom to the human spirit, the beauties of love and friendship, and the pleasures of the simple life, Burns achieved a universality that commentators believe is the single most important element in his work.

Freedom and Love The topic of freedom—political, religious, personal, and sexual—dominates Burns's poetry and songs. Burns's innumerable love poems and songs are acknowledged to be touching expressions of the human experience of love in all its phases: the sexual love of "The Fornicator," the emotion of "A Red, Red Rose," and the happiness of a couple grown old together in "John Anderson, My Jo."

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Burns's famous contemporaries include:

Francisco Goya (1746–1828): The official painter for Spain's royal family, Goya's style straddled the classical and the modern. His use of color, his brush strokes, and his subversive subject matter would prove highly influential to later nineteenth-century painters.

John Dalton (1766–1844): English chemist and physicist, Dalton was the first modern scientist to propose a model of atomic theory.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): An international celebrity in his own lifetime, Scott wrote several historical novels that were widely read and highly influential. His medieval epic *Ivanhoe* kicked off a craze of castle building among England's nobility.

George III (1730–1820): King of Great Britain and Ireland from 1760 to his death, George is best remembered today for being the king who lost the American colonies and for his "madness" that rendered him nonfunctional for the last decade of his reign.

Mungo Park (1771–1806): A Scottish explorer, Park gained widespread fame for his first journey to discover the source of the Niger River. Although unsuccessful, Park's solitary adventures in the African interior made him something of a celebrity. He returned for a second expedition with forty Europeans, all of whom, including Park, perished on the expedition.

Vitality Another frequently cited aspect of Burns's poetry is its vitality. Whatever his subject, critics find in his verses a riotous celebration of life, an irrepressible joy in the fact of living. This vitality is often expressed through the humor prevalent in Burns's work, from the bawdy humor of "The Jolly Beggars" and the broad farce of "Tam o' Shanter" to the irreverent mockery of "The Twa Dogs" and the sharp satire of "Holy Willie's Prayer." Burns's subjects and characters are invariably humble, their stories told against the background of the Scottish rural countryside. Although natural surroundings figure prominently in his work, Burns differed from Romantic poets in that he had little interest in nature itself, which in his poetry serves but to set the scene for human activity and emotion.

Scottish Nationalism Burns's deep interest in Scotland's poetic heritage and folkloric tradition resulted in his amending or composing more than three hundred songs, for which he refused payment, maintaining that this labor was rendered in service to Scotland. Each written to an existing tune, the songs are mainly simple yet

affecting lyrics of the common concerns of love and life. A great part of Burns's continuing fame rests on such songs as "Green Grow the Rashes O" and, particularly, "Auld Lang Syne."

Works in Critical Context

Although his poetry is firmly set within the context of Scottish rural life, most critics agree that Burns transcended provincial boundaries. Edwin Muir commented: "His poetry embodied the obvious in its universal form, the obvious in its essence and truth." This quality makes his work vulnerable to one charge often leveled against it—lack of imaginative subtlety. Some critics contend that Burns's passionate directness renders him insensible to a more delicate expression of imagination; they find his poetry too accessible, too easily penetrated. A related objection is that Burns's philosophical themes are trite, coming dangerously close to the sentimental and naive. Iain Crichton Smith carried the argument further, stating that Burns's very universality weakens his stature as an individual poet: as Burns has no voice or philosophy that is uniquely his own, his poetry is "artless" in the negative sense of that word. The majority of critics, however, hold that Burns's simplicity of theme is true to life—that his philosophy, while not profound, is true to itself and to human nature. It is widely admitted that Burns's message is not primarily an intellectual one; rather, he expresses the familiar emotions and experiences of humanity. Critics agree that this talent rendered Burns particularly fit for his role as a lyricist.

"The Cottar's Saturday Night" Initial publication of Burns's poems in 1786 was attended by immense popular acclaim, but eighteenth-century critics responded with more reserve. They eagerly embraced the romantic image of Burns as a rustic, untaught bard of natural genius—an image Burns himself shrewdly fostered—but some critics, particularly English critics, were somewhat patronizing. They found the Scots dialect quaint to a point but ultimately intrusive and distracting. Sentimental poems such as "The Cottar's [or Cotter's] Saturday Night" and "To a Mountain Daisy" received the most favorable attention; Burns's earthier pieces, when not actually repressed, were tactfully ignored. "The Jolly Beggars," for example, now considered one of Burns's best poems, was rejected for years on the grounds that it was coarse and contained low subject matter. Although these assessments held sway until well into the nineteenth century, more recent critics have taken an opposing view. "The Cottar's Saturday Night," an idealized portrait of a poor but happy family, is today regarded as affectedly emotional and tritely moralizing.

"To a Mountain Daisy," "To a Mountain Daisy," ostensibly occasioned by the poet's inadvertent destruction of a daisy with his plow, is now considered one of

Burns's weakest poems. Like "The Cottar's Saturday Night," it is sentimental and contains language and images that contemporary critics find mushy and false. "To a Mountain Daisy" is often compared with "To a Mouse," as the situations described in the poems are similar; the latter is the poet's address to a mouse he has disturbed with his plow. Most critics today believe that "To a Mouse" expresses a genuine emotion that the other poem lacks, and does so in more engaging language.

Interestingly, "To a Mountain Daisy" was written primarily in standard English, while "To a Mouse" is predominantly in Scots; critical reaction to these two poems neatly encapsulates the debate over whether Burns's best work is in English or Scots. The issue remains unresolved, but on the whole, earlier critics preferred Burns's English works, while recent critics have favored his Scots. Eighteenth-century commentators viewed Burns's use of dialect as a regrettable idiosyncrasy, but modern critics contend that his English poems tend to degenerate into stilted neoclassical diction and overstated emotion.

Responses to Literature

- 1. In his poem "A Red, Red Rose," Burns uses several metaphors to describe his love for a woman. Do you think some of these metaphors are more effective than others? Give examples and explain your reasoning.
- 2. Why do you think Burns's more melodramatic poems are the ones best remembered today?
- 3. Can you think of a modern form of poetry that uses a distinctive dialect? How does the use of dialect in poetry affect the reader? Do you think it enhances the poetry?
- 4. Burns uses a combination of English and Scottish dialect in "To a Mouse." Why do you think he chose to combine the two? Why do you think certain passages were written in Scottish dialect?
- 5. After reading "To a Mouse," write a poem of your own addressed to a small animal or insect that you often encounter but pay little attention to. Try to imagine how it would see you and how you would explain your life to it.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Burns's use of the Scottish vernacular is one of the most distinctive aspects of his poetry. Other poets have used the same approach in their work:

Barrack-Room Ballads, a poetry collection by Rudyard Kipling. Like Burns, Kipling wrote poetry in a distinctive regional dialect of the British Isles, in this case the Cockney slang of the common British enlisted man. Lyrics of a Lowly Life, a poetry collection by Paul Laurence Dunbar. Although most of his poems were written in conventional English, Dunbar, an African American poet, was one of the first to write poems in the dialect of Southern black culture, as in this 1896 collection.

The Works of D. H. Lawrence, a collection by D. H. Lawrence. Many of Lawrence's poems were written in the dialect of his native Nottinghamshire, what critic Ezra Pound called "the low-life narrative."

Songs of Jamaica, a poetry collection by Claude McKay. Published in 1912, these poems were the first published in McKay's native patois, an English-African hybrid language of the Caribbean islands. McKay would go on to be a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance of black writers and artists during the 1920s.

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Samuel Butler Samuel Butler ■

BORN: 1835, Nottinghamshire, England

DIED: 1902, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: *Fiction*MAJOR WORKS:

Erewhon; or, Over the Range (1872)

Life and Habit (1878)

Erewhon Revisited Twenty Years Later (1901)

The Way of All Flesh (1903)

Overview

Samuel Butler was a renowned English author of the late Victorian period. A notorious iconoclast, he presented a scathing portrait of Victorian family life in the autobiographical novel *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), created satires of English society in *Erewhon; or, Over the Range* (1872) and *Erewhon Revisited Twenty Years Later* (1901), and



Samuel Butler Butler, Samuel, painting. The Library of Congress.

opposed the dominant literary, religious, and scientific ideas of his day in numerous essays. Butler's perceptive criticisms of Victorian England, influential during his lifetime, exerted an even greater impact on subsequent generations of writers and thinkers. As a result, he is often cited as one of the primary progenitors of the early-twentieth-century reaction against Victorian attitudes.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

From England to New Zealand Butler was born on December 4, 1835, in a small village in Nottinghamshire, England, to Reverend Thomas Butler, the son of an Anglican clergyman and the grandson of a bishop, and Fanny Worsley. Butler grew up in England at a time known as the Victorian era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories (including New Zealand). Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era also witnessed an extended period of peace and prosperity, leading many free to pursue intellectual interests and occupy themselves with the complex rules of behavior found in "proper" society.

Educated at a boarding school near his home, Butler later attended the prestigious Shrewsbury School, where the curriculum emphasized classical studies. Butler continued his education at Cambridge, and, after graduating in 1858, followed family tradition by preparing to enter the clergy. During his clerical training, however, he developed doubts about his vocation, and the next year he announced to his father that he did not wish to be ordained. After much debate, during which alternative careers in medicine, art, and diplomacy were proposed, it was decided that Butler would be allowed to move to New Zealand with a small financial endowment and attempt to establish himself there as a rancher. He left England soon afterward, arriving in the Canterbury region of New Zealand in January of 1860.

Butler remained in New Zealand for nearly five years, running a highly successful sheep ranch and eventually doubling the value of his original investment. As owner of the ranch his duties were light, and he was able to read a great deal during this period. In 1861 Butler read Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species (1859) in which Darwin outlined his theory of evolution through natural selection. The book strongly influenced Butler; he later commented that, for him, the theory of evolution had replaced Christianity. He subsequently submitted a series of articles to the Canterbury Press in 1862, defending and extrapolating from Darwin's theory. Butler's writings attracted much attention throughout New Zealand, and in 1863 Darwin himself wrote to the Press, praising Butler's clear comprehension of his work. That year Butler's father compiled a collection of his son's letters and had them published as A First Year in Canterbury Settlement (1863). Soon afterward Butler sold his ranch to become a full-time contributor to the Canterbury Press.

Return to England and Turn to Satire Returning to England late in 1864, and after an unsuccessful attempt to become an artist, he began writing his first major satire, Erewhon; or, Over the Range in 1870. Published anonymously in 1872, Erewhon—which, although it was an imaginary country, was clearly based on England and its Victorian society—was an immediate success; when Butler let it be known that he was the author of the work, he was thrust into the limelight. His renown was soon heightened by the publication of The Fair Haven (1873), a satirical denunciation of Christian doctrines misinterpreted by some clergymen as a brilliant defense of those beliefs. Butler next began work on the novel The Way of All Flesh, but soon realized that its intensely negative portrait of his family would gravely offend those members still living. In 1878 he set the uncompleted work aside.

During the last two decades of his life, Butler continued to oppose the dominant ideas of his time by publishing two controversial philological essays, contending in one that the *Odyssey* had been written by a woman and in the other that William Shakespeare had written his sonnets for a homosexual lover who, although socially inferior to the playwright, had treated him in a cavalier fashion. He also published English translations of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, collaborated with his friend Henry Festing Jones on a number of musical compositions, and

intermittently worked on the manuscript of *The Way of All Flesh*. Before his death in 1902 Butler left instructions that this last work should not be published until after the deaths of his two sisters, but his literary executor, R. A. Streatfeild, ignored those instructions and published *The Way of All Flesh* in 1903.

Works in Literary Context

Butler's most successful works were influenced both in form and content primarily by two thinkers, Jonathan Swift and Charles Darwin. Butler utilized a Swift-like sense of humor, channeled through his many works of satire. In Darwin, on the other hand, Butler found the germ of an idea—evolution—and developed from this seed a vast, varied, and highly criticized supplemental theory concerning the means of evolution. Without these predecessors and their themes, it is difficult to determine what Butler's body of work would look like.

Satire Erewhon, a satirical text whose targets are religion and Victorian society, has been criticized by some as too various in its scope, combining satire and utopianism in an inextricable mixture. But it is probably the most effective book of its kind in English literature since Swift's Gulliver's Travels (1726), which it resembles and which certainly influenced Butler. As Swift had done, Butler also makes the reader aware of the new perspectives from which any culture can be seen when reflected and distorted in an alien setting. Among his many telling suggestions, perhaps the most prophetic is that crime can be viewed as disease and illness as malingering; now there are specialists in the psychology of the criminal and in psychosomatic medicine.

Evolution In Life and Habit, Butler addressed the issue of biological evolution. After long consideration of Darwin's theory, Butler had come to believe that Darwin had failed to accurately identify the mechanism by which evolutionary adaptations were passed on from one generation to the next. Butler developed in Life and Habit and in three subsequent volumes the theory that biological traits are inherited through an unconscious memory of adaptations made by an organism's ancestors in response to some specific need or desire, suggesting that this memory was incorporated into the physical structure of an embryo at the time of conception. Butler's concern with Darwin's work led to a celebrated conflict between the two men, produced not by the differences in their theories, but by a misunderstanding. In 1879 Darwin wrote a preface for the English translation of Ernst Krause's essay on Darwin's grandfather, who had also written about evolution. To the translation of his essay Krause added negative remarks concerning Butler's theory, and Butler, who had read the original German version, erroneously attributed these revisions to Darwin. Embittered by what he considered unfair and unprofessional attacks on his ideas, Butler harbored resentment toward Darwin for the rest of his life, and Butler's subsequent volumes of scientific writings contain numerous

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Butler's famous contemporaries include:

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): Author of *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin is credited with the theory of evolution, a concept that was crucial to Samuel Butler's work

Kate Chopin (1850–1904): American author whose *The Awakening* (1899) was extremely controversial during her lifetime because its heroine rejects her traditional female roles.

Carl Spitteler (1845–1924): This Swiss poet was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1919.

Ephraim Shay (1839–1916): American inventor who developed and patented the Shay locomotive, a widely used version of the steam locomotive.

Machado de Assis (1839–1908): This author of short stories and novels is considered the greatest Brazilian writer of all time.

Ferdinand von Zeppelin (1838–1917): German inventor whose greatest achievement is the development of the airship that bears his name.

negative references to Darwin's work. Despite his feelings about Darwin the man, however, Butler's feelings about Darwin the biologist's theories remained positive, and their influence on Butler's work was tremendous.

Works in Critical Context

During his lifetime, Butler's critical reputation was based on the success of *Erewhon*. His scientific writings, like *Life and Habit*, were viewed with interest but were generally dismissed as inferior to those of Darwin, whom critics deemed more qualified to discuss questions of biological evolution.

Butler's posthumous rise to fame after the comparative obscurity in which he had lived out his life makes an interesting chapter in the history of literature. Obituaries reveal that in 1902 his work was not regarded as important, and The Way of All Flesh was hardly noticed on its publication in 1903; the Times Literary Supplement did not review it until 1919, by which time the novel's fame had finally forced it to do so. But slowly critics and writers began to speak out. Through the years he was studied, emulated, and praised by Arnold Bennett, Desmond Mac-Carthy, Arthur Clutton-Brock, George Bernard Shaw, Marcus Hartog, Augustine Birrell, Edmund Gosse, Gilbert Cannon, W. Bateson, C. E. M. Joad, and E. M. Forster. Further, the anti-Victorian tenor of Butler's writing was well before his time, and his criticisms of the restraints of his society, though controversial at the time, would soon become commonplace as England transitioned into the twentieth century and, in turn, modernity.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of Butler's theories suggests that machines mark the next step in the evolution of human beings. The idea that mankind's creations will someday supplant mankind itself is a common fear, expressed in many forms of art. Here are some more works that deal with the fearful interaction between mankind and its creations:

The Terminator (1984), a film directed by James Cameron. In a future not that distant, not only have cyborgs—halfmachine, half-human organisms—become reality but so has time travel. These cyborgs, called terminators, are sent back in time to kill the mother of a future resistance leader.

"Trucks" (1978), a short story by Stephen King. In this short story, set in a truck stop, humans huddle together in fear as semis come to life and slay their owners.

I, Robot (1950), a collection of short stories by Isaac Asimov. Science fiction pioneer Asimov established many of the conventions of robot interaction with humans now common in fiction and film.

The Way of All Flesh After 1903, the widely read and much-discussed The Way of All Flesh overshadowed all of Butler's previous writings; appearing during one of the first waves of anti-Victorian reaction, the novel was hailed by critics as a brilliant exposé and praised for its satiric wit. The Way of All Flesh was admired in particular by Bloomsbury critics Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Desmond MacCarthy, and E. M. Forster, who, while admitting that the novel was flawed, nevertheless found in it the embodiment of their own ideals. During the 1920s and 1930s, however, Butler's reputation suffered a decline, with many politically and socially radical critics viewing his iconoclasm as limited and entirely conventional. In a renowned biography of Butler, Malcolm Muggeridge suggested that despite his outward posture of dissent Butler in fact failed to free himself from the most essential preconceptions of Victorian society, concluding that he was "not so much the anti-Victorian, as the ultimate Victorian."

Critics regard *The Way of All Flesh* as Butler's most important work, significant both as a perceptive autobiography and as a brilliant criticism of the attitudes and institutions of Victorian England. While critics praise the satiric wit and keen intelligence displayed in the book, many suggest that Butler's bitterness led him to subordinate such literary elements as plot and characterization to tirade, resulting in a powerful but nevertheless flawed work of literature. Others, however, have defended the depth and subtlety of Butler's characterizations, noting that the only unsuccessful character in the novel is the

main character, Ernest Pontifex, who appears to have been granted Butler's great intelligence but given limited emotional depth.

Responses to Literature

- Butler is highly regarded for his works of satire, including but not limited to the two *Erewhon* texts.
 Can you think of any books or films that satirize American society in this way? How are these satires like Butler's?
- 2. Consider all the various machines around you, and think about what kinds of human actions they have replaced or altered. What do you make of Butler's theory that the proliferation of machines marks the next step in human evolution? Support your thoughts in a short essay.
- 3. Using the Internet and your library, find out about the latest theories regarding evolution. Write a short essay comparing Butler's understanding of the evolutionary process to today's common theories of evolution. How are they similar? How are they different?
- 4. Read *The Way of All Flesh*. Then, using the Internet and the library, research some of the Victorian practices Butler satirizes. Based on your reading of Butler's text and your research, do you think that Muggeridge's claim that Butler wasn't "anti-Victorian" so much as the "ultimate Victorian" is accurate? In a short essay, explain your reasoning.

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A. S. Byatt

BORN: 1936, Sheffield, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Novels, poetry, essays, short stories

MAJOR WORKS:

Iris Murdoch: A Critical Study (1976) The Virgin in the Garden (1978)

Possession: A Romance (1990)

Babel Tower (1996)

The Biographer's Tale (2000)

Little Black Book of Stories (2004)

Overview

A best-selling novelist, short-story writer, distinguished critic, and winner of many prestigious awards and prizes, A. S. Byatt is one of the most ambitious writers of her generation. Her short stories are of crucial interest in connection with her overall work and with regard to postmodernist developments of the genre. Because of her imaginative wisdom and understanding of contemporary culture, Byatt's short stories significantly enrich the



A.S. Byatt Byatt, A.S., photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

postmodern literary scene, while she enjoys a high profile in the media and in public life in general.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Gifted Student A. S. Byatt was born Antonia Susan Drabble on August 24, 1936, in Sheffield, England, the eldest daughter of John Frederick Drabble, a courtroom lawyer, and Kathleen Marie (née Bloor), a schoolteacher. She is the sister of writer Margaret Drabble. She was educated at Sheffield High School and the Mount School, York, a Quaker foundation. Antonia took a bachelor of arts degree (with first-class honors) from Newnham College, Cambridge, and pursued postgraduate study at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania (1957–1958) and Somerville College, Oxford (1958–1959).

Academic and Literary Pursuits From 1962 to 1971, she taught in the Extra-Mural Department of London University and from 1965 to 1969 at the Central School of Art and Design, London. She also published her first two novels, Shadow of a Sun (1964) and The Game (1967), as well as her first study on Iris Murdoch, Degrees of Freedom (1965). In 1969, Byatt married Peter John Duffy, with whom she has two daughters, Isabel and Miranda.

The 1970s were a fruitful decade for Byatt in terms of academic work. In 1970 she published the study Wordsworth and Coleridge in Their Time, which was followed by her second monograph on Murdoch, published in 1976. In 1972 she was appointed a full-time lecturer in English and American literature at University College London. She was appointed a Booker Prize judge for 1974 and a member of the BBC Social Effects of Television Advisory Group (1974–1977) as well as of the Board of Communications and Cultural Studies of the Council for National Academic Awards (1978–1984). After publishing her third novel, The Virgin in the Garden (1978), she edited, together with Nicholas Warren, George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss (1979) for Penguin Classics.

Major Success in Fiction In 1981 she was promoted to a senior lectureship, and in 1983, when she was elected fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, she retired from academic life to write full-time. In 1985 she published her fourth novel, Still Life, which won the PEN/Macmillan Silver Pen Award for fiction. She served on the Board of Creative and Performing Arts (1985–1987) as well as the Kingman Committee on the Teaching of English (1987–1988), and in 1990 she published George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings.

Byatt's career as a novelist reached a turning point in 1990, when the publication of *Possession: A Romance* brought her international fame. She was appointed a Commander of the British Empire (CBE) in addition to winning the Irish Times/Aer Lingus International Fiction

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Byatt's famous contemporaries include:

Tony Blair (1953–): Prime Minister of the United Kingdom between 1997 and 2007, leader of the Labour Party from 1994 to 2007, and member of Parliament for Sedgefield between 1983 and 2007.

Hilary Rodham Clinton (1947–): First Lady to the forty-second president of the United States and a U.S. senator from New York.

J. K. Rowling (1965–): World-renowned British writer of the Harry Potter series.

Arundhati Roy (1961–): Indian novelist and activist who has won such awards as the 1997 Booker Prize and the 2002 Lannan Cultural Freedom Prize.

Prize, the Eurasian Regional Award of the Commonwealth Writers Prize, and, most important of all, the Booker Prize for Fiction. By December 1995 *Possession* had been translated into sixteen languages, and its phenomenal success has often been compared to that of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980), or Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). Byatt's next novel, *Babel Tower* (1996), took six years to write and publish.

Currently, Byatt holds several honorary doctorates, lives in London, and contributes regularly to journals and newspapers including *The Times Literary Supplement, The Independent*, and the *Sunday Times*, as well as to radio programs and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

Works in Literary Context

Influences In merging realism and naturalism with fantasy, Byatt has been influenced by an eclectic group of esteemed writers, from George Eliot to Robert Browning. In her midcentury-England novels, she takes inspiration from such writers as D. H. Lawrence. And she references everything from Romantic and Victorian literature to research books on zoology as also informing her intertextual work. But "The novelist I love most," she asserts, "is Marcel Proust." "After him, [Honoré de] Balzac, [Charles] Dickens, Eliot, Thomas Mann and [Henry] James, Iris Murdoch, Ford Madox Ford, and Willa Cather. And Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky."

High Style A central characteristic of Byatt's handling of stories is the manner in which they are made to refer to their own status as texts and the ways in which different narrative expectations and multiple types of text—letters, diaries, journals, fairy tales—are merged. In this respect, Byatt's entire collection abounds in what are called inter-

textual references, careful and thorough blends of multiple outside texts into her own. That is, her writing is rich in echoes of her earlier works or works by other authors as well as in self-conscious allusions to the narrative. As one reads Byatt's fiction, one recognizes characters (the academic, the professional storyteller, the woman writer, the painter or craftsman, siblings, daughters, children suspended between life and death, marginalized middleaged women), their interest in art and literature, and their obsessions with words, with truthfulness, with the body, and with the past, as well as recurrent symbols and images, such as snakes, pools, paintings, and glass objects.

In another respect, Byatt refuses to give shape and finality to her characters and the conditions in which they find themselves. This impression of indeterminacy and openness enhances her "fantastic vein."

High Impact While she agrees she is indebted to multiple influences, Byatt alone catapulted to the front of the queue of contemporary British writers with her fifth novel, *Possession: A Romance* (1990). The work likewise influenced a great number of new and veteran scholars, prompting a surge in critical studies about her work and a mass of interviews with her both in academic journals and in popular magazines.

Works in Critical Context

Critics have unanimously praised the way in which Byatt weaves intricate fictions out of small details and situations. Although many incidents in her early stories point to her own life, the emphasis is less on their autobiographical dimension than on the phenomenon of how fantasy interacts with real life. Lived experience furnishes the raw data out of which the writer spins her tales. While several of her works prompt studied discussion, a few stand out as especially provocative—among them *Possession: A Romance*.

Possession: A Romance The novel reflects Byatt's increasing interest in the short story, because it includes, in the work of the character Christabel LaMotte, "wonder tales," two of which were reprinted as separate stories in Byatt's The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye: "The Glass Coffin" and "Gode's Story." While Richard Todd, in his book A. S. Byatt (1997), has argued that these stories read differently divorced from the context of the novel, Jane L. Campbell in "The Somehow May Be Thishow': Fact, Fiction, and Intertextuality in Antonia Byatt's 'Precipe-Encurled'" (1991) has stressed the experimental, intertextual nature of the stories themselves.

The publication of *Possession* also led to a reappraisal of Byatt's earlier work, a compilation of which was published in *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings* (1991). This selection of earlier writings includes reviews and essays on Robert Browning, Eliot, Vincent van Gogh, Willa Cather, Elizabeth Bowen, Sylvia Plath, Toni Morrison, Barbara Pym, and Monique Wittig. In the introduction to *Passions of the Mind*, Byatt explains a feature

characteristic of her whole writing career—the link between creative and academic work, the "encounter with other minds," and the connection with the cultural past.

Responses to Literature

- 1. While Reading *Possession: A Romance* consider what the word "romance" means and look at all the ways Byatt presents romance in her novel. Look up "romance" in the dictionary and consider the various definitions of the word with reference to this book.
- 2. View the film version of *Possession: A Romance*. In the film, the nationality of one of the characters is changed from British to American. How does this change your understanding of the story?
- 3. Byatt has written two critical studies of Iris Murdoch, a British writer who weaves philosophical themes into her novels. Research the life and works of Murdoch in your library and on the Web. What reasons can you give that Byatt would be attracted to Murdoch and her work as a field of study? Write a paper summarizing your conclusions.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Byatt's novel *Possession* intersperses two different story lines with a long poem in a complex narrative. Other books that successfully blend literary genres and plotlines include:

The Blind Assassin (2000), a novel by Margaret Atwood. This prize-winning novel blends two storylines, one set in contemporary Canada and one set in World War Ilera Canada, with a pulp science fiction novel.

Pale Fire (1962), a novel by Vladimir Nabokov. The highly unusual structure of this novel has been the subject of much critical attention. Nabokov present a long poem "Pale Fire" as the work of a fictional author. The book also features commentary by a fictional editor.

Lord Byron's Novel: The Evening Land (2005), a novel by John Crowley. Like Possession, this novel centers on an adventure in literary research. The efforts of the research to discover a lost novel by English poet Lord Byron are interspersed with sections of the novel in question.

Lord Byron

BORN: 1788, London, England DIED: 1824, Missolonghi, Greece

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: *Poetry*MAJOR WORKS:

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Canto the Third

(1812-1818)

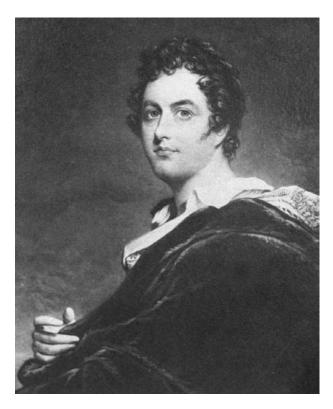
Don Juan (1819-1824)

Overview

The English poet George Gordon Noel Byron, 6th Baron Byron (1788–1824), was one of the most important figures of the Romantic movement. Because of his impressive literary works, active and controversial personal life, and renowned physical beauty he came to be considered the personification of the Romantic poethero.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

George Gordon Noel Byron was born, with a clubbed right foot, in London on January 22, 1788, the son of Catherine Gordon of Gight, an impoverished Scots heiress, and Captain John ("Mad Jack") Byron, a fortune-hunting widower with a daughter named Augusta. The wasteful captain squandered his wife's inheritance, was absent for the birth of his only son, and eventually left for France as an exile from English creditors.



George Gordon, Lord Byron Byron, George Gordon, engraving-photograph. The Library of Congress.

An Unstable Upbringing for a Nobleman In the summer of 1789 Byron moved with his mother to Aberdeen. Emotionally unstable, Catherine Byron raised her son in an atmosphere variously colored by her excessive tenderness, fierce temper, insensitivity, and pride. She was as likely to mock his lameness as to consult doctors about its correction. From his Presbyterian nurse Byron developed a lifelong love for the Bible and an abiding fascination with the ideas of inborn evil and predestined salvation. Early schooling instilled a devotion to reading and especially a passion for history that informed much of his later writing.

On the death of his granduncle in 1798, Byron inherited his title and estate. He enjoyed the role of nobleman, proud of his coat of arms. Byron then spent four years at Harrow, one of Britain's finest independent schools, where he excelled in oratory, wrote verse, and played cricket.

Byron then attended Trinity College, Cambridge, intermittently from October 1805 until July 1808, when he received an M.A. degree.

Instant Success Born of Mediterranean Travels In 1807 Byron's early works were collected under the title Hours of Idleness; it was harshly criticized by the Edinburgh Review. The irate author counterattacked in his next book, English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers

(1809). In this volume, Byron showed the first signs of his satiric wit and aristocratic education.

In 1809 a two-year trip to the Mediterranean countries provided material for the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Their publication in 1812 earned Byron instant glory, as they combined the more popular features of the late-eighteenth-century romanticism: colorful descriptions of exotic nature, disillusioned meditations on the vanity of earthly things, a lyrical exaltation of freedom, and above all, the new hero, handsome and lonely, somberly mysterious, yet strongly impassioned despite his weariness with life.

Scandalous Social Life While his fame was spreading, Byron was busy shocking London high society. After his affairs with Lady Caroline Lamb and Lady Oxford, his incestuous and adulterous love for his half sister Augusta not only made him a scandal, but also reinforced the sense of guilt and doom to which he had always been prone. From then on, the theme of incest was to figure prominently in his writings, starting with the epic tales that he published between 1812 and 1816: The Giaour, The Bride of Abydos, The Corsair, Lara, The Siege of Corinth, and Parisina. Byron's marriage to Anna Isabella Milbanke in 1815 soon proved a complete failure, and she left him after a year. On April 25, 1816, Byron left his native country, never to return.

An Extravagant Expatriate with an Interest in Politics In Switzerland, Byron spent several months in the company of the Romantic poet Percy Shelley, resuming an old affair with Shelley's sister-in-law, Clare Clairmont. Under Shelley's influence he read works by poet William Wordsworth.

In October 1816 Byron left for Italy and settled in Venice, where he spent many days and nights living extravagantly. His compositions of 1817, however, show signs of a new outlook. Instead of Byron's previous pessimism and world-weariness, the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* includes sizable sections devoted to the theme of political freedom and national independence—a cause to which he later devoted himself personally. Byron, it seems, was swept up in the revolutionary fervor that typified the decades that followed the American and French revolutions in the late eighteenth century. In addition, the witty, good-humored satire of *Beppo* was a turn toward a more satirical and comic mode and was a preparation for Byron's masterpiece, *Don Juan*, begun in September 1818.

Hero in the Greek War of Independence After serving as an organizer in the Carbornari, and Italian revolutionary group that opposed Austria, Byron became an active participant in the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829) against the Ottoman Empire. He used part of his considerable personal fortune to refit the Greek fleet and helped organize an attack on the Ottomans at Lepanto. In April 1824, before the attack could take

place, Byron fell seriously ill. He died on April 19, 1824, during a violent electrical storm.

In memorial services throughout the country, he was proclaimed a national hero of Greece. His death proved effective in uniting Greece against the enemy and in eliciting support for its struggle from all parts of the civilized world. In October 1827 British, French, and Russian forces destroyed the Turkish and Egyptian fleets at Navarino, assuring Greek independence.

Byron's body arrived in England in June 1824, and for two days lay in state in a house in Great George Street, London. On Friday, July 16, 1824, Lord Byron was buried in the family vault beneath the chancel of Hucknall Torkard Church near Newstead Abbey.

Works in Literary Context

Although Byron is commonly accepted as part of the British Romantic movement in literature (which encompasses the years 1798 through 1826 and includes such authors as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Sir Walter Scott, Percy Shelley, and John Keats), he departed from that tradition in a few significant ways.

Satire After his first attempts at poetry were criticized by the Edinburgh Review, Byron struck back in his English Bards, and Scotch Reviewers, a longer satirical poem taking jabs at both some of the better-known English poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge as well as the critics. The volume was well received and displayed Byron's gifts for comedic satire that would eventually find fuller expression in Beppo and Don Juan.

Neoclassical Virtues Neoclassicism is the return to literary forms and styles used in previous times; for Byron, it meant the use of traditional styles and structures used by earlier English authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer. While many of the Romantic poets turned from the neoclassical structures and abstract themes of the Augustan movement of Jonathan Swift, John Dryden, and Alexander Pope, Byron advocated the virtues of neoclassicism early in his career and never completely abandoned his admiration of Pope or his use of the heroic couplet—pairs of rhyming lines with stress on the final syllable of each line.

Works in Critical Context

Although his first book of poems was panned by some reviewers, Byron found widespread popularity with the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Since then, he has been considered one of the finest satirical and poetic voices of the nineteenth century.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Taken together, the four cantos of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage helped establish Harold as the archetype of the "Byronic Hero," a world-weary but intelligent and attractive hero traveling the world. Sir Walter Scott declared in 1816 that Byron had created a new and significant Romantic character

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Byron's famous contemporaries include:

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822): British Romantic poet and friend of Byron.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851): Author of *Frankenstein* (1818) and wife of Percy Shelley.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832): German poet, playwright, and philosopher.

Arthur Wellesley, First Duke of Wellington (1769–1852): British hero of the Napoleonic Wars.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850): British Romantic poet and Poet Laureate of England from 1843 to 1850.

Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Scottish writer of popular works such as *Ivanhoe* (1820) and *Rob Roy* (1818).

type, and others praised the poem for its seriousness and passion

Don Juan After writing the lighter parody of *Beppo*, Byron turned toward the mock heroic quest of Don Juan. However, Byron's treatment of this Romantic hero and libertine legend did not garner the same type of admiration, and both the poem and the poet were vilified in the reviews. Critics called the poem "filthy and impious," and the poet "a cool, unconcerned fiend." Fortunately, the criticism has abated and now scholars view the sixteen cantos of *Don Juan* to be an excellent example of the lengthy narrative poem, some claiming that Byron's narrative skill in poetry is only matched by Chaucer's.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Byron's childhood was defined by his access to privilege: a good education, a title, money to live and travel. In what ways is this upper-class upbringing apparent in his poetry? Look for specific references to nobility and privilege.
- 2. Much of Byron's most successful work is satire and parody. Research the conventions and forms of eighteenth-century satire. Do you think these works were effective at prompting change in the societies in which they were written? Why or why not? What are some particularly successful forms of satire and parody today?
- 3. Critics and scholars have made much of Byron's relationship with his older half sister Augusta and the pervasive themes of incest and adultery in Byron's poetry. Find examples of these themes in his poetry. Do you think critics of Byron reacted appropriately to these elements of his work? Why or why not?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Byron's works were inspired by or describe travels. Here are some other works inspired by journeys:

The Odyssey (eighth or ninth century BCE), an epic by Homer. This epic poem exerted a marked influence on all of Western literature. It tells the tale of the Greek hero Odysseus as he tries to return home to Ithaca after fighting in the Trojan War.

The Canterbury Tales (late fourteenth century), a work of fiction by Geoffrey Chaucer. Chaucer has each of the voyagers on a pilgrimage to Canterbury tell a story as they journey along together.

Don Quixote (1605), a novel by Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes's mentally unbalanced knight sets off on a quest through Spain with his sidekick Sancho Panza.

The Lord of the Rings (1954–1955), a trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien. These three novels follow the effort by Frodo Baggins, a mythical humanlike being called a hobbit, to destroy a magical ring and, with it, an evil lord.

On the Road (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. Kerouac's famous novel about his road trips across the country (and to Mexico) helped inspire a generation of travelers, poets, and hipsters.

- 4. What are the characteristics of the "Byronic Hero," and are there any heroes in modern literature that display those characteristics?
- 5. Similar to many poets, Byron spent much of his adult life away from his native England. Do you think traveling and experiencing foreign cultures is a necessary part of a poet's career? Can you think of examples of successful poets who did not travel from their native region or country?
- Compare Byron's treatment of the Don Juan legend with any of the previous incarnations. In what ways is

Byron's hero more sympathetic or less offensive than earlier versions?

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João Cabral de Melo Neto

BORN: 1920, Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil DIED: 1999, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

NATIONALITY: Brazilian

GENRE: *Poetry* MAJOR WORKS:

Death and Life of a Severino: A Pernambucan

Christmas Play (1955) Museum of Everything (1975) A Knife All Blade: Poetry (1980)

Overview

João Cabral de Melo Neto has earned international acclaim as one of Brazil's most original and influential poets of the post–World War II era. In his work, Cabral examines the ways in which language describes not only the world around the poet, but also its own way of describing that world: the metalinguistics of verse. Unlike many Brazilian poets, he considered poetry a written rather than an oral art form, and his consequent emphasis on syntax and structure, rather than on phonetics and sound, differentiates his work from much other Brazilian poetry. Cabral also aimed to remove his own personality from his work as much as possible, to allow the pure, objective meaning of the work to shine through.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Man of the People Cabral is almost invariably referred to as a poeta pernambucano—that is, a poet from the northeastern Brazilian state of Pernambuco, the land-scape and atmosphere of which he frequently drew on in his poetry. The second son of Luis Antonio Cabral de Melo and Carmen Leão Cabral de Melo, he grew up on the family's various sugarcane plantations in Pernambuco, surrounded by—but separate in status from—the farmworkers. Whenever they went to the nearby town, the

illiterate workers would bring back booklets called *literatura de cordel* (string literature), which the young Cabral would then read to them. He later portrayed these farm laborers in such poems as "The Discovery of Literature," which appeared in *The School of Knives* (1980).

Poetry Anticipates Career to Come When he was only seventeen, Cabral wrote two poems on the Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello. Though not major works, they are interesting for what they anticipate in a career that was to last half a century. The familiar idea that life is theater (as found in Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author, 1922) is neatly laid out in these pieces in unrhymed free verse that is hard to approximate in English. Before long, though, Cabral began to write formal poetry in quatrains and other familiar verse forms. Almost from the beginning, he was attracted to the surrealism of such French poets as Guillaume Apollinaire. In 1937, when Cabral wrote his poems on Pirandello, surrealism had been part of the European artistic scene for almost a generation, and Apollinaire himself had been dead since 1918. It was still avant-garde, however, in a remote place such as Recife, far up the Atlantic coast from Rio de Janeiro, the then Brazilian capital. The sense of coming from behind-though not necessarily needing to catch up with—Europe played an important role in much of Cabral's poetic output. It was perhaps most significant in his long 1956 poem, A Knife All Blade, where Cabral saw himself as taking up a poetic challenge cast by (Spanish) Andalusia.

Diplomatic Service Provides Poetic Inspiration In 1945, Cabral published The Engineer, consisting of poems written between 1942 and 1945. In these, Cabral was already moving toward a new, "objective" concept of poetry that involved rational control of the emotions. That same year, he passed the examination that admitted him to the Instituto Rio Branco, the college for diplomats. His admission marked the beginning of a career in the diplomatic service. Cabral was to become a government representative in a way that has been, to some

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cabral's famous contemporaries include:

Truman Capote (1924–1984): American author credited with establishing the nonfiction novel as a literary genre with his book *In Cold Blood* (1966).

Indira Gandhi (1917–1984): First and, to date, the only female prime minister of India, Gandhi was assassinated by her own bodyguards midway through her fourth term in office.

Günter Grass (1927–): Nobel Prize—winning German author, best known for his first novel, *The Tin Drum* (1959).

George H. W. Bush (1924–): Bush was the forty-first president of the United States, and is the patriarch of a political clan that includes forty-third U.S. president George W. Bush and former Florida governor Jeb Bush.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Famed Argentinean author, internationally recognized as one of the most important Latin American writers and thinkers of the twentieth century.

Alain Badiou (1937–): Perhaps the most prominent French thinker of the late twentieth century, Badiou is known for his work on attempting to define the concept of truth.

extent, specific to Latin America; like Cabral, literary figures such as fellow Brazilian Vinícius de Moraes, Chilean Pablo Neruda, and Mexicans Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes all served as representatives of their respective governments at different points in their careers.

Cabral's first diplomatic post, in 1947, was with the Brazilian consulate in Barcelona, Spain, a city that profoundly influenced his poetry. He created a small publishing house, Livro Inconsútil, which brought out Spanish and Brazilian poetry, including two of his own books, *Psychology of Composition, with the Story of Anfion and Antiode* (1947) and *Dog without Feathers* (1950). In the course of four decades of service as a diplomat, Cabral found himself in Great Britain, Switzerland, and Paraguay. He was appointed first ambassador to Senegal and, later, ambassador to Honduras. Throughout, he continued to write poetry.

Retirement and Recognition After retiring from diplomatic service in 1987, Cabral resided in Rio de Janeiro until his death from a degenerative ailment in 1999. The author of more than twenty-five books of poetry, Cabral was elected to the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 1968 and awarded the São Paulo Literary Prize in 1992. After blindness struck him in 1994, Cabral became reclusive. He died on October 9, 1999, a few months before he would have turned eighty.

Works in Literary Context

Clear and Evocative Language Believing that poetry should act as a vehicle for communicating the interrelationships between the organic and inorganic between what is alive and what is not-Cabral often uses multiple comparisons to capture the true essence of a subject or object. In "Estudos para uma Bailadora Andaluza," for example, Cabral compares an Andalusian dancer to fire, a mare, a telegraph operator, a tree, a statue, and a maize plant. Critics maintain that Cabral's comparisons also emphasize his belief that humanity in general is more important than the individual. Cabral's concern with the poetic process is also apparent in such works as *Psychology* of Composition, a collection in which Cabral advocates objectivity and understatement in poetry and attacks what he considers the principal weaknesses of modern poetry excessive lyricism and romanticism.

Portrayals of Pernambuco Cabral is also known for his repetition of images and his tightly structured syntax. Portrayals of life specific to northeastern Brazil recur throughout much of his poetry. In such poems as "Morte e vida Severina" Cabral describes the misery of an impoverished peasant fleeing drought, while "A cana dos outros" depicts the relationship between the owner of a sugar plantation and a peasant who performs the labor. Cabral also uses images of objects like knives, razors, and scalpels to describe anything with a piercing or aggressive nature. In "As facas Pernambucanas," for example, Cabral employs descriptions of different types of knives to suggest the tension between the people of Pernambuco's interior and those of its coastal areas.

A Poetic Engineer Throughout his career, Cabral often compared poets to engineers and poems to machines. Upon being awarded the Neustadt Prize, he explained his concept of poetry as an engineering project: "[Poetry] is the exploration of the materiality of words and of the possibilities of organization of verbal structures, things that have nothing to do with what is romantically called inspiration, or even intuition." For Cabral, poetry was a tool and a methodology for exploring and understanding the world and the human, emotional place in it—not the heady, flighty fantasy-stuff of the Romantic poets.

Works in Critical Context

In an essay in Latin American Literary Review, Richard Zenith remarked: "Following the slow 'education by stone' which couples patience with passion, [Cabral de] Melo Neto has achieved a poetry that on the one hand is veritable and verifiable art, and on the other hand participates meaningfully (precisely for its artistic rigor) at the sociological level." Commenting on the modernist aspects of Cabral's poetry in World Literature Today, Aguinaldo Jose Goncalves suggested that the "nature of Cabral's influences is one of the more important aspects to determine the structure of his poetry. These influences

embrace several systems of art that conflate in the space of verbal language....The poem leads the reader to face a difficult and fascinating universe of words."

Trying Not to Perfume the Flower "I try not to perfume the flower," Cabral once claimed of himself. And indeed, as Djelal Kadir has noted, "Scarcity is one of the fundamental principles of João Cabral's poetics." He is a sparing writer, concerned with presenting the world as nearly as it is as possible. There is little question that his sparse, image-driven poetry represents an important—perhaps even crucial—way of seeing the world.

Poetry as Play In 1955, Cabral published his bestknown work, Death and Life of a Severino: A Pernambucan Christmas Play, a painful story about a poor man from northeast Brazil who, having lost his piece of land to a drought and a rich farmer, has nowhere to go. The story of Severino is an allegory. The name comes from the Latin severo, which means severe or rigorous, like the land he tried to farm, the sertão—a dry land where only low bushes grow. He represents the people of this harsh region, where droughts are constant and hardly anything grows. Severino wanders from the sertão in the hinterland to the coast in the vicinity of Recife, trying to find conditions in which to survive; it is a scene of despair. But a child is born—a sign of survival and hope—and so he abandons the idea of suicide. Due to the structure of the play, it was not preformed as Cabral originally intended until four years after its initial publication. In 1960, however, the work was staged with music by Chico Buarque de Hollanda, first in Brazil and then in Europe. The musical setting that this gifted young composer provided for the play had much to do with its success in Europe and Brazil, which was widespread. It is produced from time to time, and much of the score was recorded in 1966 on a long-playing record in Brazil.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Based on a reading of at least three of the poems in *A Knife All Blade: Poetry*, consider what it might mean for a knife to be "all blade." How does the image or the idea of the knife in these poems help Cabral to develop a new image of the world around him?
- 2. Contrast Cabral's northern Brazilian slant with the local focus of the works of William Butler Yeats, N. Scott Momaday, Yoko Kawashima Watkins, or Rudolfo Anaya. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a deeply local poetry, when it comes to trying to talk about "the human condition" in general?
- 3. Discuss a poem by Cabral that demonstrates his skill with cadence and caesura, which is an audible pause that breaks up a line of verse when read aloud. Why do you think the caesura has served as such an important poetic device in so many different languages? In your response, compare and contrast Cabral's verse with that of at least one other poet.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Cabral saw his poetic work explicitly as a tool to be used in comprehending the world around him. In this, he is part of a long tradition of poets concerned with what has come to be known as hermeneutics, a field of philosophy dedicated to interpretation and meaning. Here are several other poets and thinkers who focused on the interpretation of others, the world, and texts in their work:

Truth and Method (1960), a philosophical work by Hans-Georg Gadamer. This book is one of the most thorough modern attempts to figure out and explain what it means for people to understand one another. Nature (1836), an essay collection by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson, an American Transcendentalist poet, suggests in several essays in this volume that there is a difference between reason and understanding, and that he prefers the intuitive truth-seeking he sees in the former. "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (1807), a poem by William Wordsworth. This songlike poem sees the poet seeking to understand how an adult consciousness can fail to see properly the world around it. Vectors: Aphorisms and Ten-Second Essays (2001), a poetry collection by James Richardson. The author explores the idea and experience of understanding from

five hundred different directions, concluding that "writ-

ing is like washing windows in the sun. With every

attempt to perfect clarity you make a new smear."

4. Write a poem in imitation of Cabral, describing the world around you as evocatively as you can, doing your best to keep your own thoughts and emotions as much in the background as possible. What about this exercise is difficult? What about it feels natural? How does writing your own poem in this manner influence the way you read Cabral's poetry?

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Guillermo Cabrera Infante

BORN: 1929, Gibara, Cuba DIED: 2005, London, England

NATIONALITY: Cuban

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Asi en la paz como en la guerra: Cuentos (1960, In Peace as in War: Stories)

Vista del amanecer en el tropico (1965, View of Dawn in the Tropics)

Tres tristes tigres (1967, later published in English as Three Trapped Tigers)

La Habana para un infante difunto (1979, Infante's Inferno)

Holy Smoke (1985)

Overview

Guillermo Cabrera Infante is considered one of Latin America's most original and influential writers. Although he lived in exile from his native Cuba from the mid-1960s onward, much of his fiction is set in Havana and details the repressive and violent sociopolitical climate during the regime of Fulgencio Batista—prior to the Cuban revolution in 1959. Cabrera Infante largely eschews traditional literary forms, relying heavily on wordplay and loosely structured, nearly plotless narratives. His satiric, inventive prose has been compared to that of Lewis Carroll, James Joyce, Jonathan Swift, and Laurence Sterne.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Writing Under (and Against) Batista Cabrera Infante was born in 1929 in the Oriente province of Cuba. His mother and father founded the local Communist Party and, when their son was seven years old, were arrested and had their property confiscated. The impact



Guillermo Cabrera Infante Infante, Guillermo Cabrera, photograph. AP Images.

of these events on Cabrera Infante's work can be seen in the political content of his writings. Following a brief period in prison, his parents moved their family to Havana. Cabrera Infante became interested in literature while attending the University of Havana, which he left in 1948 to pursue a literary career. He edited the journal Bohemia, founded the literary magazine Nueva Generacion, and helped establish the Cinemateca de Cuba (Film Library of Cuba). In 1952, Cabrera Infante was jailed and fined for publishing a story in Bohemia that contained English-language obscenities. Two years later, he became the film critic for Carteles, one of Cuba's most popular magazines, writing under the pseudonym G. Cain. Cabrera Infante's writing at this time was censored for its political content and reflects the author's clandestine activity against the Batista regime as part of a loose network of revolutionaries.

Fidel Castro Takes Power When Fidel Castro seized power in 1959, Cabrera Infante became involved with the new government, serving on the Bureau of Cultural Affairs and later becoming cultural attaché to Brussels, Belgium. He also acted as the director of Lunes de Revolucion, the literary supplement to the pro-Castro newspaper Revolucion. In 1960, Cabrera Infante published his first fiction collection, In Peace as in War. The following year, Castro

disbanded the *Lunes de Revolucion* when its editors protested the censorship of a documentary film directed by Cabrera Infante's brother, Saba Cabrera Infante, that depicted Havana's nightlife during the height of Batista's rule. Leaving Cuba in 1965—in large part because of dissatisfaction with Castro's regime—Cabrera Infante eventually settled in London.

Living in Exile, Successfully In 1967 his novel Three Trapped Tigers was published, earning the author international recognition. For several years, however, his income was derived primarily from the writing of such screenplays as Wonderwall (1968), Vanishing Point (1970), and Under the Volcano (1972). Throughout the 1970s, Cabrera Infante continued writing books in Spanish, including Vista del amanecer en el tropico (1974; View of Dawn in the Tropics), Exorcismos de esti(l)o (1976), and La Habana para un Infante difunto (1979; Infante's Inferno). In the 1980s he traveled and lectured throughout the United States and Latin America, in addition to publishing his first book written in English, Holy Smoke (1985). Over the years, he came to ever more fiercely oppose Castro's oppressive regime, writing particularly impassioned polemics against the Cuban government in the wake of its 2003 jailing of nearly eighty journalists, poets, and others. Until his London death in 2005, Cabrera Infante regularly published essays in newspapers, popular magazines, and scholarly journals.

Works in Literary Context

Writing Fiction During the Cuban Revolution Cabrera Infante's fictional works typically deal with Cuba's political experience in the twentieth century. The short stories in In Peace as in War are written in the mode of social realism and convey the author's contempt for the Batista dictatorship. Cabrera Infante later repudiated this work as being overly realistic at the expense of creativity. In the novel Three Trapped Tigers, widely regarded as one of the most important works of contemporary Latin American fiction, Cabrera Infante abandoned social realism for a humorous narrative developed through a series of monologues. Written primarily in Cuban street vernacular and narrated by several characters, Three Trapped Tigers depicts a society descending into physical and spiritual confusion; language itself becomes grotesque as it is reshaped by people struggling for new means of communication.

In *View of Dawn in the Tropics* Cabrera Infante again explores pre-Castro Cuba. Similar in structure to *In Peace as in War*, this book is a compendium of over one hundred vignettes tracing the entire history of Cuba. Jorge H. Valdes has contended that the collection depicts Cuban history "as a repetitive and often accidental course of events always leading to an unhappy ending." Set in Havana, Cabrera Infante's next book, *Infante's Inferno*,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cabrera Infante's famous contemporaries include:

Fulgencio Batista (1901–1973): This militant dictator, abhorred by Cabrera Infante, ruled over Cuba until 1958—when he submitted to pressure from Fidel Castro's guerrilla movement during the Cuban revolution.

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Hailing originally from Colombia, this author is one of Latin America's most famous and was recognized for his contribution to twentieth-century literature in 1982, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize.

Fidel Castro (1926—): Recently replaced by his brother Raúl Castro as president of Cuba, this revolutionary organized the successful overthrow of Batista's dictatorship, an event that had a major impact on the Cuban revolution.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Argentinian author of unusual works often considered to be the forerunners of magic realism.

Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977): Renowned Russian-American author most famous for his provocative novel Lolita (1955)

George H. W. Bush (1924–): The forty-third president of the United States.

chronicles the sexual initiation of a youth who bears many of the author's biographical traits.

Wordplay A trademark of Cabrera Infante's work is his abundant wordplay. This is seen in everything he writes, but especially in *Three Trapped Tigers*. This work, which chronicles Havana nightlife on the eve of Batista's fall, abounds with puns, parodies, and wordplay. As with his novels and short stories, Cabrera Infante imbues his nonfiction works with verbal exuberance and rich evocations of Cuban society. Of the nonfiction book *Holy Smoke*, the first book Cabrera Infante wrote in English, John Gross has noted, "[Joseph] Conrad and [Vladimir] Nabokov apart, no other writer for whom English is a second language can ever have used it with more virtuosity."

Writing for and About Films Cabrera Infante worked on screenplays for several films during the 1970s and 1980s, one of which—Vanishing Point—is considered a classic by many viewers, including writer-director Quentin Tarantino. Cabrera Infante published two collections of film criticism, A Twentieth-Century Job (1963) and Arcadia todas las noches (1978), which critics have praised for their judicious insights into the work of American and European filmmakers. John King has additionally noted that A Twentieth-Century Job provides "an engaging portrait of Cuban intellectual life in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Revolutionary moments in history are often accompanied by a flurry of artistic output, an expression of the different possibilities brought about by monumental changes in political and social structures. As the formerly oppressed struggle to find their voices among competing ideas and drives, questions of national and personal identity collide in the wake of falling order. Cabrera Infante's unique style captures the uncertainty of such moments. Other works that explore the uncertainty of revolutionary moments include:

Democracy in America (1835), a nonfiction work by Alexis de Tocqueville. Written during a period of intense cultural and political transformation in America, this frequently studied work discusses democracy as the preferable means of negotiation during revolutions of all kinds. Dubliners (1914), a short-story collection by James Joyce. This famous collection of short stories explores revolutionary moments, or epiphanies, within the individual. The Order of Things (1966), a nonfiction work by Michel Foucault. Exploring revolutionary moments from the perspective of post-structural theory, this work explores how the conditions of discourse—what kinds of communication are possible—shift from one "episteme," or historical-conceptual paradigm, to another.

the 1950s." *Holy Smoke* is a factual account of the history of the cigar and contains an anthology of famous smoking scenes from literature and film.

Works in Critical Context

Writing That Defies Categorization As aptly noted by author and critic Ardis L. Nelson, with books that defy categorization, Cabrera Infante has inspired a wealth of critical response and conjecture. David P. Gallagher asserts that Cabrera Infante aims to demolish literature as a solemn and pretentious art form by using everyday spoken language and by parodying writers, among other techniques. Since Cabrera Infante denies that he writes novels, there is an ongoing debate as to the genre of his works. While Isabel Alvarez-Borland argues that he writes short stories, vignettes, and essays, combining them in a fragmented mosaic, Emir Rodriguez Monegal contends that his work is largely autobiographical.

Three Trapped Tigers established Cabrera Infante's reputation as a writer of innovative fiction, a reputation that only some critics find justified by his other works. Playing with words is an important part of Infante's Inferno and his nonfiction work, Holy Smoke. Unlike the nearly universal acclaim received for Three Trapped

Tigers, critics were unable to reach a consensus on these two works. While some praised Cabrera Infante's continued use of puns as innovative, others had grown tired of the Cuban's verbal contortions.

Infante's Inferno and Holy Smoke Commenting on Infante's Inferno in the New York Review of Books, Michael Wood complains that Cabrera Infante's relentless punning "unrepentedly mangles language and hops from one tongue to another like a frog released from the throat. Some of the jokes are ... terrible.... Others are so cumbersome, so fiendishly worked for, that the noise of grinding machinery deafens all the chance of laughter." New York Review of Books contributor Josh Rubins has similar problems with Holy Smoke. He comments, "In Holy Smoke... the surfeit of puns seems to arise not from mania... but from a mere tic. Or, worse yet, from a computer program."

"A Good Writer, but a Bad Revolutionary" Other reviewers are not so harsh in their criticism. In Enrique Fernandez's Voice Literary Supplement review of Infante's Inferno, for example, the critic observes that the novel is written in "an everyday Cuban voice, unaffected, untrammeled, [and] authentic." John Gross of the New York Times hails Cabrera Infante as a master in the use of language. Commenting on Holy Smoke, he claims: "Conrad and Nabokov apart, no other writer for whom English is a second language can ever have used it with more virtuosity. He is a master of idiomatic echoes and glancing allusions; he keeps up a constant barrage of wordplay, which is often outrageous, but no more outrageous than he intends it to be."

Cabrera Infante's works have been criticized by some for their lack of ideological commitment, but they have been lauded by many for their genius. Since *Three Trapped Tigers*, his works have been forbidden in Cuba, where he is widely considered to be "un buen escritor, pero mal revolucionario": a good writer, but a bad revolutionary.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Summarize the picture of Havana portrayed in *Infante's Inferno*. What emotional response(s), if any, did you feel as you were reading? Explain your reaction to Cabrera Infante's choice of literary style.
- Discuss the influence of Cabrera Infante's political experiences on the content of his writings. Make sure to support your discussion with examples from both his fiction and nonfiction works.
- 3. Explain how Infante's study of James Joyce's *Dubliners*, which he translated into Spanish in 1972, may have influenced his works.
- 4. Cabrera Infante rejects the idea that his writings, including his most famous work, *Three Trapped Tigers*, can be categorized as novels. If you had to assign a genre to *Three Trapped Tigers*, what would it be, and why? Use examples from the book to support your opinion.

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Morley Callaghan

BORN: 1903, Toronto, Canada DIED: 1990, Toronto, Canada NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

They Shall Inherit the Earth (1935) The Loved and the Lost (1951) Morley Callaghan's Stories (1959) The Many Colored Coat (1960) Close to the Sun Again (1977)

Overview

Morley Callaghan was one of Canada's most distinguished writers. He was unquestionably the first to have



Morley Edward Callaghan Callaghan, Morley Edward, photograph.

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established a major international reputation, which he started building in the late 1920s in the little magazines of Paris and the slick monthlies of New York, where his first short stories appeared. A brief participant in the Lost Generation scene in Paris during the late 1920s, Callaghan returned home to Toronto, where he continued a productive writing life.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Middle-Class Upbringing in Toronto Morley Edward Callaghan was born in Toronto on February 22, 1903. The second of two sons of Thomas and Mary Dewan Callaghan, Roman Catholics of Irish descent, he was named after John Morley, biographer of Edmund Burke. He was raised in a middle-class home where there was much music and discussion of literature. He began writing early, and while attending Riverdale Collegiate, the young Callaghan had his first feature article published in the Star Weekly. At St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, Callaghan read constantly, continued to write nonfiction, and began experimenting with fiction. In 1923 he joined the staff of the Toronto Star.

Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and the Lost Generation Callaghan met Ernest Hemingway at the Toronto Star. Hemingway, who had been a European correspondent for the paper and spent much of his time in Paris, was back briefly in Toronto writing from the newsroom. The two reporters became friends and often would go to the Star library to chat and exchange the short stories they wrote in their spare time. Callaghan's writing also gained the attention of F. Scott Fitzgerald, another American writer living in Paris. After successfully publishing his first novel and first short-story collection with the help of Fitzgerald's editor, Callaghan married his college sweetheart, Loretto Florence Dee, in 1929 and the two sailed to Paris for their honeymoon.

Callaghan spent time with both Hemingway and Fitzgerald while in Paris, and in so doing became associated with the Lost Generation—a term popularized by Hemingway for a group of American writers who lived in self-imposed exile, primarily in Paris, in the years following World War I. These writers were considered "lost" because of the disillusionment experienced during and after the war.

The relationship between Callaghan and Hemingway soured after a boxing match between the two, in which Callaghan knocked down his older and larger opponent. Fitzgerald, who served as timekeeper for the match, tried to cover for Hemingway, saying as timekeeper he had mistakenly let the round go overtime, unfairly tiring Hemingway. The experience strained the friendship between Callaghan and Hemingway. And perhaps worse, it fixed Callaghan in the minds of many as a marginalized member of the Lost Generation. In many books on that era and in much that has been written on Callaghan since then, the boxing incident gets much more discussion than Callaghan's writing, which is either dealt with superficially or overlooked. Tiring of the Paris scene, Callaghan returned home in the fall of 1929.

War and a Fiction Dry Spell Although he was involved in other projects, Callaghan wrote little fiction from 1938 to 1947. He has called this "the dark period of my life." The author traced his initial lack of productivity to a numbness triggered by the spread of World War II in Europe. His break from novel and short-story writing was also helped along by a flirtation with the theater. In 1938 he was asked by New York Theatre Guild producer Lawrence Langner to write a stage play from his 1935 novel They Shall Inherit the Earth. The result was Turn Again Home. He wrote a second play that year, Just Ask for George, and both plays were optioned for Broadway. Neither was produced because of a lack of financial backing and the unavailability of key actors. They were not staged until a decade later.

Award-Winning Work In the early 1950s, Callaghan began appearing on television as a panelist on the

show *Fighting Words*, moderated by influential theater critic Nathan Cohen. One benefit to this work was the travel it afforded to other Canadian cities, where Callaghan constantly looked for material for his fiction. He found it in Montreal, using Canada's most exotic and wide-open city as the backdrop for *The Loved and the Lost*. The book, exploring the then explosive topic of relations between whites and blacks, is one of Callaghan's best books. It sold over five hundred thousand copies in paperback alone and was adapted as a musical for Broadway. It also won Canada's Governor General's Award for fiction in 1951, the first of several major awards he was to receive.

Hemingway's Ghost Besides having to face mixed reviews for A Passion in Rome (1961), Callaghan also had to deal with the ghost of Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway's July 1961 suicide led to many journalists' discovery that Callaghan had been an early friend of his. Editors and reporters began calling him for his memories of the early days with Hemingway. Callaghan eventually tired of it all, especially the reporters' rehashing of the unfortunate boxing match. He decided to set the record straight with his 1963 book That Summer in Paris: Memories of Tangled Friendships with Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Some Others.

Despite advancing years, Callaghan kept up a steady writing pace. In 1974 Winter was published. A Fine and Private Place appeared the following year. While Callaghan's short stories had not been in the major slick magazines for many years, his work began turning up during the 1970s in Exile, a small Canadian literary quarterly. Exile became his laboratory, running excerpts from his works in progress. One such piece was a forerunner to the novel Close to the Sun Again, published in 1977. The Toronto Globe and Mail named it "the best Canadian novel" of the year.

In 1984, after fifty-five years of marriage, Callaghan's wife, Loretto, died. In 1985, the Canadian publishing house of Lester & Orpen Dennys, in conjunction with Exile Editions, brought out a short-story collection titled *The Lost and Found Stories of Morley Callaghan*. After outliving most of his contemporaries, he suffered a brief period of illness and died on August 25, 1990.

Works in Literary Context

"Writing had to do with the right relationship between the words and thing or person being described," Callaghan once said. "The words should be as transparent as glass." Writing in a direct, unadorned language from a nonjudgmental point of view, Callaghan often dealt with the struggle of flawed but noble individuals to make it in a hostile or indifferent world. His stories concern the problems of people in the mainstream. As he wrote in the introduction to *Morley Callaghan's Stories*, they are the problems of "many kinds of people..., [though] I neglected those of the very, very rich." He wryly added, "I have a story that begins, 'Once upon a time there were two millionaires,' but I haven't finished it yet."

Biblical Themes Many of the locales of Callaghan's stories are Canadian, but the themes are not. Instead, the themes are universal or common to North America, a choice Callaghan consistently made in his refusal to become a generically Canadian writer. Rich in symbolism and irony, Callaghan's fiction especially explored biblical themes. They Shall Inherit the Earth borrows from the stories of Cain and Abel and the prodigal son. The Many Colored Coat tells a secular story of the duplicity of corporate life and modern values but makes consistent references to Joseph and his coat of many colors, a young man who models the scapegoating and subsequent forgiving of his accusers expressed by Callaghan's protagonist. Rich with messages of redemption and salvation, these themes offer added significance to several of the writer's works.

Influences Callaghan's work with religious themes in the 1930s takes influence from a contemporary, the French philosopher Jacques Maritain, whom Callaghan knew in 1933. He was also influenced by American and European writers, including, as he recalled in his 1963 memoir, "[Fyodor] Dostoyevsky, Joseph Conrad, Sinclair Lewis, [Gustave] Flaubert; The Dial, The Adelphi, the old Smart Set, edited by H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan; Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence..., everything."

Works in Critical Context

Some critics have likened Callaghan's style to Ivan Turgenev's or Anton Chekhov's, and others have compared his approach to Hemingway's. Scholar Brandon Conron notes the difference: "Moral rather than physical courage is [Callaghan's] concern." He is an author who has steadfastly gone his own independent way, leaving others to contend with the passing literary fads. Publisher Thomas McCormack of St. Martin's Press conceded in a 1978 interview that Callaghan may suffer for not being plugged into the latest vogue, "but he is part of the spinal literature of the twentieth century that people will remember."

The Many Colored Coat (1960) This book, like so many of Callaghan's, divided the critics, including those in his own country. Canadian Literature editor George Woodcock found that the novel is too long and that it "hovers uneasily between sharpness of caricature and the flabbiness of sentimental pseudo-realism." Canadian novelist Hugh MacLennan contended that the work is "over most people's heads, and possibly mine, also.... To me this is a deeply disturbing, rather wonderful and hard-to-comprehend novel." Renowned critic Edmund Wilson,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Callaghan's famous contemporaries include:

Clare Booth Luce (1903–1987): American editor, activist, and writer, she was also a high-profile socialite, a congresswoman with a Republican seat in the House of Representatives, and an ambassador to Italy.

Mary Norton (née Spenser) (1903–1992): British children's author known for several stories made into movies, including a series produced as the Disney movie *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (1971).

Maxwell Perkins (1884–1947): American journalist who worked as an editor at Charles Scribner's Sons and was responsible for the introduction of such writers as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and John Dos Passos.

Sylvia Beach (1887–1962): American owner of the famous Shakespeare and Company English-language bookshop in Paris through the 1920s and 1930s.

Maria Tallchief (1925–): Native American (Osage Nation) ballerina, she has performed at several venues, has had a number of pieces composed for her, and cofounded such ballet companies as the Chicago City Ballet.

however, examined the responses to Callaghan's novels and wondered "whether the primary reason for the current underestimation of Morley Callaghan may not be simply a general incapacity—apparently shared by his compatriots—for believing that a writer whose works may be mentioned without absurdity in association with Chekhov's and Turgenev's can possibly be functioning in Toronto."

Responses to Literature

- 1. As Brandon Conron notes, Callaghan's short stories follow a "recognizable formula. They are all self-contained anecdotes. Their opening is usually a declarative statement that sets the stage for a drama that most frequently is psychological and involves little action. A problem is posed and, by description, dialogue, and internal monologue, the story moves with easy economy through a climax to an ending which may not resolve the dilemma but invariably leaves it haunting the reader's mind." Write your own short story using Callaghan's formula. Make a declarative opening statement to set the stage. Give your character a problem to solve. Follow through with dialogue, monologue, and a climax. Decide whether to resolve or not resolve the issue.
- 2. Look up the definitions for *minimalism* and *realism*—two terms often applied to Callaghan's

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Further tribute to Callaghan's talents as a short-story writer is the fact that he had pieces in fourteen of Edward O'Brien's twenty-six annual anthologies, *The Best Short Stories*. Here are a few works by short-story writers who also took inspiration from the everyday around them and who also succeeded in making the same honor—being anthologized several times over:

- "For Love of the Hills" (1912), a short story by Susan Glaspell. This story about a girl who feels that the city of Chicago has failed her was first printed in *Little Masks* by Frederick Stokes of New York.
- "Girl" (1983), a short story by Jamaica Kincaid. This very short story, a kind of domestic girl mantra, was first published in *At the Bottom of the River* by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux of New York.
- "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1955), a short story by Flannery O'Connor. This story of a family vacation gone dark was first published in the title by the same name by Harcourt in New York.
- "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1975), a short story by Ursula K. Le Guin. This story of the perfect community with the perfect scapegoat first appeared in *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*, published by Harper in New York.
- "Soldier's Home" (1925), a short story by Ernest Hemingway. This short story about Harold Krebs, a soldier returning from war, was first published in *In Our Time* by Charles Scribner's Sons in New York.
- writing. What characteristics does each style boast? What do you find striking about each style?
- 3. Find a good working definition of *allegory*. Which of Callaghan's stories could be consider allegories?
- 4. If you are working with a group who is reading Callaghan, have a discussion about the level of difficulty of his work. Share examples with others of where he seems to "go over" a reader's head. Discuss why you think such works are so difficult.

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☑ Italo Calvino

BORN: 1923, Santiago de Las Vegas, Cuba

DIED: 1985, Siena, Italy
NATIONALITY: Italian
GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Path to the Nest of Spiders (1947)

Italian Folktales (1956)

Invisible Cities (1972)

If on a Winter's Night a Traveler (1979)

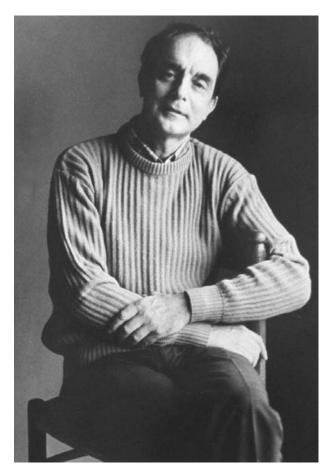
Mr. Palomar (1983)

Overview

Italo Calvino was a noted journalist, essayist, and writer of fiction. Perhaps best remembered today for such literary works as *Invisible Cities* and the "Our Ancestors" trilogy, which blended fantasy, fable, and comedy to illuminate modern life, Calvino also made important contributions to the fields of folklore and literary criticism. Calvino's growth as a writer paralleled the major literary trends of the last forty years; he moved from stories firmly grounded in reality to challenging story structures that simultaneously defied and redefined the traditional form of the novel. All the while, his writing remained accessible to the general reading public. More than two decades after his death, Italo Calvino's writings remain both widely respected and crucially relevant to modern literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The Child of Scientists Italo Calvino was born in Cuba in 1923. His father, Mario, a botanist, was forty-



Italo Calvino Calvino, Italo, photo by Elisabetta Catalano. The Library of Congress.

eight when Calvino was born; his mother, formerly Eva Mameli, also a botanist, was thirty-seven. Shortly after his birth, his family returned to their native Italy. They raised Calvino on their farm in San Remo, where he would spend the better part of the next twenty years.

He attended public schools, and because his parents were nonreligious, he did not receive a religious education, nor was he subjected to the obligatory political indoctrination of fascist leader Benito Mussolini's Italian government. A family tradition of devotion to science led him to enter the school of agriculture at the University of Turin, where his father was a distinguished professor of tropical agriculture.

War Stories and Political Tracts Calvino's studies were interrupted, however, when he received orders to join the Italian army. During World War II, Italy was a key member of the Axis powers, along with Germany and Japan; these countries fought against the Allied powers of England, France, and eventually the United States. Opposed to fighting for a cause he didn't believe in, Calvino fled and joined the widespread resistance that was at that time fighting against Italian and German

fascists in the country. During the two years that Germany occupied Italy (1943–1945), Calvino lived as a freedom fighter in the woods of the Maritime Alps, fighting both German and Italian fascists.

At the war's end in 1945, Calvino joined the Communist Party, which supported the rights of workers and the collective sharing of both resources and wealth. He also returned to the University of Turin, this time enrolling in the faculty of letters. He graduated one year later with a thesis on British author Joseph Conrad. He also began writing for left-wing papers and journals.

Antonio Gramsci, the Marxist critic and cofounder of the Italian Communist Party whose writings were published posthumously in book form in the 1940s, exercised a remarkable influence on Calvino. Gramsci called for a national popular literature that would be accessible to the people and receptive to their real concerns. This new literature would be vibrant and rooted in social values and would cover a range of contemporary topics, including film, the American novel, music, and comic books.

Calvino began to record his war experiences in stories that eventually became his highly acclaimed first novel, *The Path to the Nest of Spiders* (1947). In this work he revealed the war as seen through the eyes of an innocent young soldier, the first of many youthful or naive protagonists he would use to reflect life's complexity and tragedy. Considered a member of the school of neorealism—a literary movement that sought to bring a feeling of authentic real-life events and emotion into writing—Calvino was encouraged by such writer friends as Natalia Ginzburg and Cesare Pavese to write another novel in this tradition. These friends also invited him to join the staff of their new publishing house, Einaudi. He accepted and remained affiliated with Einaudi all his life.

Parisian Relocation By the middle of the 1950s, Calvino was spending most of his time in Rome, the literary as well as political hub of Italian life. Tired of writing tracts for communist periodicals and, like many European intellectuals, disillusioned by the spread of dogmatic Stalinism—which shared many of the same ideals as communism, but in practice resulted in a murderous dictatorship—he resigned from the Communist Party. His disillusionment with Stalinist tyranny and perversion of communist ideals was sealed with the crushing of the Hungarian revolt in 1956 by forces of the Warsaw Pact. Indeed, as the years passed, Calvino became increasingly skeptical of politics in general.

In 1959, Calvino visited America for six months, and in the early 1960s, he moved to Paris. While living in Paris, he met Chichita Singer, an Argentinian woman who had been working for years as a translator for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). They were married in 1964. Also in the 1960s, Calvino joined the OuLiPo, or *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle* (Workshop of Potential Literature), an

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Calvino's famous contemporaries include:

philosopher.

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989): A Spanish surrealist painter. **Pablo Neruda** (1904–1973): Nobel Prize–winning Chilean poet also known for his outspoken communism. **Roland Barthes** (1915–1980): French literary critic and

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–): French anthropologist who developed the idea of structuralism as a method for understanding society.

Joseph Stalin (1878–1953): General secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1922 to his death in 1953; his brutal authoritarianism alienated many intellectuals affiliated with the Communist Party outside the Soviet Union.

Ernesto "Che" Guevara (1928–1967): Marxist revolutionary and guerrilla leader.

experimental workshop founded by Raymond Queneau. His association with this group would influence his subsequent work.

International Recognition and Honors The 1970s saw the publication of three of Calvino's most highly regarded novels: Invisible Cities, The Castle of Crossed Destinies, and If on a Winter's Night a Traveler. During this period he and Chichita became the parents of a daughter whom they named Giovana.

After his move to Paris, Calvino's work began to show a wider range of influences. A reconciliation with his father, which is treated in the short story "La strada di San Giovanni" (1990; translated in *The Road to San Giovanni*, 1993), gave him the freedom to explore and embrace a scientific perspective more vigorously, honing it into an attitude that blended humanist innocence and scientific wonder.

Calvino worked on the book *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* periodically for several years. In the 1973 post-script to *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*, Calvino writes about the double origin of the work. The idea first came to him in 1968 while he was attending an international seminar in which one of the participants spoke of fortune-telling with cards. Publisher Franco Maria Ricci decided to bring out an art book employing the Visconti tarot cards illustrated by Bonifazio Bembo and asked Calvino to provide the commentary.

Calvino first won international recognition as a major writer with *Invisible Cities*, which some critics consider to be his most perfect work. The book has a carefully defined mathematical structure that displays its author's abiding interest in symmetries and parallels. The

book is ostensibly a conversation between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, in which Polo enumerates the various cities of the Khan's empire. Yet it can hardly be called fiction, for it does not resemble a narrative, nor does it tell a story.

Calvino's readers had to wait six years for his next book, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979). As if to mockingly reassure his public of the authenticity of the book, he begins by stating, "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Relax..." Described by Salman Rushdie as "the most outrageous fiction about fiction ever conceived," the novel comprises the beginnings of ten other novels to emerge as a constantly mutating parody of literary genres.

Final Years Calvino's last novel was published after he returned to Rome. The protagonist in the novel Mr. Palomar (1985) is a visionary who quests after knowledge. Named for the telescope at Mount Palomar in Southern California, he is a wise and perceptive scanner of humanity's foibles and mores. While the scheme of Mr. Palomar is less complex than that of Invisible Cities, Calvino again employs ideas borrowed from science, set theory, semiotics, linguistics, and structuralism.

In 1975, Calvino became an honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters; in 1980, his *Italian Folktales* was included on the American Library Association's Notable Booklist; in 1984, he was awarded an honorary degree by Mount Holyoke College; and in 1985, he was to have delivered the Norton Lectures at Harvard. However, Calvino died at age sixty-one on September 19, 1985, in Siena, Italy following a cerebral hemorrhage.

Works in Literary Context

Inspired by the legacies of such Italian luminaries as Renaissance poet Ludovico Ariosto and revolutionary scientist Galileo Galilei, Calvino interwove an ironic and allegorical use of fantasy with a profound interest in the phenomena of science and mathematics.

Neorealism Calvino began his writing career in the mid-1940s, when neorealism was becoming the dominant literary movement. The dilemma for the young author coming of age at this time of cultural flux was whether to follow the accepted standard of social realism promoted by Marxist ideology or to move beyond literary convention on his own. For a while, Calvino was able to maintain a healthy balance and satisfy both his political commitment and evolving literary aspirations.

Folklore During the 1950s, Calvino began to move away from neorealism. His "Our Ancestors" trilogy is markedly different from his earlier works. In *The Cloven Viscount* (1952), Calvino depicts a soldier halved by a cannonball during a crusade. His two halves return to play opposing roles in his native village. *The Nonexistent Knight* (1959) details the adventures of a suit of armor

occupied by the will of a knight who is otherwise incorporeal. And *The Baron in the Trees* (1957) recounts the saga of a boy who, rebelling against the authority of his father, spends the rest of his life living in the branches of a forest. All three works, set in remote times, rely on fantasy, fable, and comedy to illuminate modern life.

Calvino frequently acknowledged that much of his fantastic material was indebted to traditional folklore. In 1956, he published his reworking of Italian fables, *Italian Folktales*, which has achieved an international reputation as a classic comparable to the work of the Brothers Grimm.

Science and Mathematics Calvino continued to "search for new forms to suit realities ignored by most writers." In the comic strip, he found the inspiration for both t zero (1967) and Cosmicomics (1968). In these pieces, which resemble science fiction, a blob-like being named Qfwfq, who variously exists as an atomic particle, a mollusk, and a dinosaur, narrates the astronomical origins of the cosmos as well as the development of the species over millennia. Calvino made further use of mathematics and logic in t zero, a collection of stories in which he fictionalized philosophical questions concerning genetics, cybernetics, and time.

Postmodernism Much of Calvino's later works are considered to be postmodernist, a sometimes vague and imprecise category. Postmodern literature relies on such techniques as the use of questionable narrators, fragmentation, and metafiction—the deliberate tweaking of narrative conventions. Postmodernist writers tend to reject the quest for finding order amid chaos that characterized earlier modernist works, instead often reveling in creating a sense of paradox or deconstructing the traditional narrative structure, as in *Invisible Cities*.

Influences and Legacy Long an admirer of classical literature, Calvino's earliest influences were drawn from the likes of fellow countrymen Dante and Ariosto, as well as Honoré de Balzac, Miguel de Cervantes, and William Shakespeare. After his relocation to Paris, he built on this core of the Italian narrative tradition and classical studies, by looking to writers such as Vladimir Nabokov, James Joyce, and Robert Musil.

Italo Calvino continues to influence modern writers such as Aimee Bender and Amanda Filipacchi, both of whom explore similar fantastic, surreal, postmodern landscapes.

Works in Critical Context

Calvino's essays on literature, collected in *The Uses of Literature* and *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, clearly define his aesthetic criteria and philosophical temperament. In *Six Memos*, he states that his goal was to achieve a clarity and lightness of language that would allow him to conduct "a search for knowledge...extended to anthropology and ethnology and mythology...a net-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In *Invisible Cities*, Calvino explores the emotional potential of imagining strange and distant lands, prompting readers to imagine their own world in new ways. Other works that allow readers a window into unusual worlds include:

Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America during the Years 1799–1804 (c. 1814), a travelogue by Alexander von Humboldt. Brilliant German naturalist and explorer Humboldt records his observations of South America in this substantial work.

The Man Who Would Be King (1975), a film directed by John Huston. Based on a Rudyard Kipling short story, this adventure movie features Sean Connery and Michael Caine as former British soldiers who have a fantastic adventure in exotic lands not seen by Westerners in centuries.

On the Road (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. This classic of the Beat Generation chronicles a wild cross-country trip by fictionalized versions of Kerouac and his friends. Though it takes place in the United States of the 1950s, the landscape is both strange and familiar, much like the cities described by Calvino.

The Abyssinian (2000), a novel by Jean-Christophe Rufin. Rufin's debut novel tells of an adventurous doctor in seventeenth-century Cairo who, through a strange turn of events, is ordered on a dangerous diplomatic mission to the king of Abyssinia.

work of connections between the events, the people and the things of the world."

Calvino has long earned favor among literary critics. From his early works, Calvino's narrative is highly personalized, exhibiting the enduring duality most critics find in his writing. Jay Schweig, on the other hand, has called Calvino's later works "postmodernism at its most frustrating."

The Our Ancestors Trilogy The three books that make up the Our Ancestors trilogy were widely praised when they were first published in the 1950s. Helene Cantarella, in the New York Times Book Review, calls the first book, The Cloven Viscount, "a dark-hued Gothic gem which transports us into the mysterious late medieval world of Altdorfer's teeming battle scenes and Bosch's hallucinating grotesques." Gore Vidal has described the philosophical theme of The Cloven Viscount as a witty and refreshing parody of the Platonic Ideal. Regarding the final book, The Baron in the Trees, Frederic Morton, writing for the New York Times Book Review, states, "Mr. Calvino...seems to have intended nothing less than the deliberate transmutation of fantastic notion into

universal allegory. Since he is not Cervantes he does not succeed—yet we are frequently entertained and even incidentally instructed." Similarly, John Updike has claimed that Calvino's novels "can no longer be called novels; they are displays of mental elegance, bound illuminations."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Italo Calvino's collection of Italian folktales was a contribution on par with the works of the Brothers Grimm. Using Calvino's work as a base, research and summarize five well-known Italian folktales.
- 2. The later works of Italo Calvino juxtapose fantastic narratives with rigorous applications of mathematical patterns. Note the appearance of numbers, patterns, sequences, and mathematics in general in such works as *Invisible Cities*, t zero, Cosmicomics, and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* and explain their function.
- 3. As a young man, Italo Calvino was insulated from, and later revolted against, the rigid and dogmatic policies of Mussolini's Italy. What was the state-approved art and literature of fascist Italy like? Can you compare fascist art to movements in art and literature that are popular today? Why do you think Calvino's parents would have wanted to protect him from such influences?
- 4. Italo Calvino's early writings are considered part of the Italian neorealist movement. What were the goals and objectives of this movement? Using your library and the Web, find out more about literary realism and neorealism. How do the two styles differ? How are they the same?

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Thomas Campion

BORN: 1567, St. Andrew Holburn, England

DIED: 1620, London, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Plays

MAJOR WORKS:

A Booke of Ayres (1601)

Observations in the Art of English Poesie (1602)

The Lord Hay's Masque (1607)

Two Books of Ayres (1613)

Third and Fourth Books of Ayres (1617)

Overview

Perhaps best known today as the composer of music and lyrics for more than one hundred songs for voice and lute, Thomas Campion was equally celebrated in his own time for his Latin poetry. He wrote a book on poetic composition urging the adoption of specific classical meters in English, and a music textbook that was sufficiently forward-looking to be republished throughout the seventeenth century. His contribution to the dramatic literature of the age consists of four masques.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Orphaned in his Teens Thomas Campion was born on February 12, 1567, in the English parish of St. Andrew Holborn. By 1580 his father, John Campion, and his mother, Lucy, were both dead, leaving him in the care of his mother's third husband, Augustine Steward, and his new wife, Anne Sisley. In 1581 he was sent to Cambridge University, where he remained until 1584, leaving without taking a degree. Two years later he was admitted to Grav's Inn to study law. He acquired no legal qualification, but likely began his writing career during this time. His connection with drama and the masque—a form of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century artistic performance designed to privately entertain a court-also began. In 1588 he acted a part in a comedy presented before noblemen that included Lord Burleigh, Lord Chancellor to Queen Elizabeth I, and in 1594 he contributed at least one lyric to The Masque of Proteus, a highly significant work in the establishment of the masque form. It is probable that in 1591-1592 Campion joined Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, on his unsuccessful expedition to aid Henry IV of France against the Catholic League in Normandy, France.

In 1595, Campion's publishing career began with the appearance of *Thoma Campiani Poemata*. In 1601, Campion and his friend Philip Rosseter jointly published *A Booke of Ayres*, the first half of which was written by Campion. Rosseter's dedication of this work to English baron and politican Sir Thomas Monson indicates that Campion had for some time been under the protection of this important musical patron. After the publication in 1602 of his treatise on meter, *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, it is assumed that Campion traveled on the European continent. He received a medical degree from the University of Caen in February 1605 and practiced medicine for the rest of his life.

The Masques Campion's masque-writing career began in 1607, when his The Lord Hay's Masque was performed on January 6 at court to celebrate the marriage of King James's Scottish favorite James Hay to Honora Denny, the daughter of a wealthy English nobleman. This marriage between a Scotsman and an Englishwoman was symbolic of the recent union between Scotland and England that James had lobbied for since 1603, when, already king of Scotland, he became James I of England as well. The masque as a whole indicates the need for love

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Campion's famous contemporaries include:

Francis Bacon (1561–1626): English statesman and scientist; established an inductive method of scientific inquiry, today known as the scientific method.

John Donne (1572–1631): English metaphysical poet and preacher; converted from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism.

Guy Fawkes (1570–1606): English Roman Catholic involved in the failed plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament and kill Protestant King James I.

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642): Italian astronomer and scientist; forced by the Inquisition to renounce his revolutionary belief that the Earth revolves around the Sun.

Ben Jonson (1572–1637): English playwright, actor, and poet known for his satirical plays.

Johannes Kepler (1571–1630): German mathematician and scientist; developed the foundation of modern optics and formulated three laws of planetary motion.

Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618): English poet, courtier, and explorer; a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I, he was involved in the settlement of the colony of Virginia.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): English poet and playwright, regarded by many as the greatest writer in the English language.

to replace ancient hostility between the nations and reflects both the symbolic joining of Scotland and England in the marriage and the actual union of the countries under James's rule.

After this work Campion published virtually nothing for six years, with the exception of the musical treatise A New Way of Making Fowre Parts in Counter-point (around 1610). In November 1612, during the preparations for Campion's next court masque (a celebration of the marriage of James I's daughter Princess Elizabeth to Frederick, Elector Palatine of Bohemia), the sudden, unexpected death of Henry, the Prince of Wales, inspired Campion's Songs of Mourning, a collection of elegies with accompanying music by Giovanni Coprario. In February 1613 Campion's The Lord's Masque was at last performed at court, with scenery and decoration by the celebrated architect Inigo Jones. Within the following year Campion was commissioned to write two additional masques for the family of the influential Lord Chamberlain, Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk, including one for the marriage of Suffolk's daughter Frances to Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, called The Somerset Masque.

Poetry of Songs In addition to the masques composed during 1613, Campion also published *Two Books of Ayres*.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Campion's reputation today rests on his lyric poetry. Lyric poetry describes poems that are strongly associated with emotion and imagination, and have a song-like resonance (Campion's were meant to be sung). Here are some works of lyric poetry.

- Gitanjali (1913), by Rabindranath Tagore. This poetry collection by the Bengali poet, composer, and writer received the Nobel Prize; Tagore's poetry has often been set to music.
- "Hymn to Aphrodite" (c. 600 B.C.E., by Sappho. This ancient Greek lyric poem dealing with unrequited love was intended to be sung.
- "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (c. 1527), by Martin Luther. This hymn and lyric poem was written by the famous German religious reformer who sparked the Protestant Reformation.
- "Auld Lang Syne" (1788), by Robert Burns. This Scottish poet wrote the lyric poem that is still sung today as each new year dawns.

The first part of the collection contains songs of a religious or devotional nature, and the second part of the volume contains love songs. In 1617 Campion published a final songbook, *Third and Fourth Books of Ayres.* Campion wrote the songs to be sung accompanied by music, but they are largely read today as lyric poetry.

Tho. Campiani Epigrammatum Libri II. Umbra. Elegiarum liber unus, a collection of Latin epigrams, was published in 1619. Campion died in London on March 1, 1620, and was buried at St. Dunstan-in-the-West, London.

Works in Literary Context

The Masque Traditionally, a masque is a courtly pageant themed around a specific occasion. Everything from the music to the costumes to the set design is meant to reflect the theme of the masque. These events featured play-like segments, often with characters meant to represent abstract ideas or emotions. The Lords' Masque (1613) begins with an antimasque of madmen as contrast to the main masque, following a formal innovation introduced by Jonson four years previously.

The Somerset Masque (1613) is significant in the history of the evolution of musical style. Its song "Bring Away This Sacred Tree," set in a highly declamatory style, marks a major step in the advance toward a quasi-operatic manner. Campion himself signaled a departure from his earlier style when in the prologue to the published text he dismissed old-fashioned myth, instead grounding his "whole Invention upon Inchauntments and several transformations."

Lyric Poetry Campion is famous for his lyric poetry. Lyric poetry is poetry that has the qualities of a song, whether or not it is meant to be sung. It often features intensely felt personal emotion. There are a variety of examples of lyric poetry forms. The most popular is the sonnet, a fourteen-line rhymed poem. Lyric poetry dates to ancient Greece, where poems were often sung to musical accompaniment. The wandering entertainer of the Middle Ages known as troubadours also produced lyric poetry, also generally with musical accompaniment. More recently, the term "lyric poetry" has been applied to poems that deal with intense feelings, such as the poems in Lyrical Ballads (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth.

Works in Critical Context

Critical response to Campion varies widely. His music receives mixed reaction today. According to Cecil Gray, "He may be conceded to possess a fertile vein of pleasant, but rather undistinguished melody and that is about all." Campion's lyrics, however, have earned critical acclaim.

The "Ayres" Campion's work was neglected for almost two hundred years, but in the late 1800s he was rediscovered by A. H. Bullen, who published the first collected edition of his various "ayres" or songs. Modernist poets T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were among his admirers. Eliot called Campion "except for Shakespeare...the most accomplished master of rhymed lyric of his time." His lyrics and the songs in which he presented them strongly reflect his period's style. Campion scholar Walter R. Davis finds his subject's influence in the works of such later poets as Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden, and Robert Creeley.

E. D. Mackerness asserts, "In his shorter pieces he evolved word patterns which fall naturally into acceptable melodic shapes; yet when considered independently of their music, these poems evoke emotional situations that are of interest for their own sake." Gail Reitenbach says that Campion was a forward-thinking and gifted poet who gave his female speakers the first independent and thoughtful portrayals found in Renaissance literature.

Elise Bickford Jorgens states that "Never Weather-Beaten Saile" in the first part of *Two Books of Ayres* (1613) "illustrates [Campion's] intricate and careful creation of musical and verbal rhythm out of the accentual pattern of the words and the sensitive distribution of the vowel sounds." And critic Thomas MacDonagh characterizes "The Peaceful Western Wind" and "There Is None, O None but You" in the second part of *Two Books of Ayres* as "masterpieces of melody."

According to Walter Davis, "In the texts of the songs" of 1613, Campion "developed contrast, the literal and factual, and he was developing a style that would culminate in a dry realistic tone that encouraged a vibrant complexity of attitude. In his music he was incorporating many different voices, and was moving toward heightened

speech rather than suggestive dance melody as a model for what music should be." MacDonagh praised the *Third* and Fourth Books of Ayres (1617) for presenting "an ever new variety of rhythm and rime and colour."

In 1996 Jorgens summarized, "Campion's importance for nondramatic literature of the English Renaissance lies in the exceptional intimacy of the musical-poetic connection in his work. While other poets and musicians talked about the union of the two arts, only Campion produced complete songs wholly of his own composition, and only he wrote lyric poetry of enduring literary value whose very construction is deeply etched with the poet's care for its ultimate fusion with music."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Using the Internet and your school's library resources, look up the definition of "masque." How is it similar to today's musical? What are the differences?
- 2. Look up the lyrics to some popular songs. How effective are they without music? How much does their emotional impact rely on the music that accompanies them? Does it depend on the style of music?
- 3. Campion was a doctor of medicine as well as a poet and composer. Using the Internet and your library's resources, research three poets who also were successful in other professions. Did having a steady job allow them to take greater creative risks in their writing? Did it stop them from fulfilling their artistic potential? Write a paper examining any similarities or striking findings.
- 4. Why do some people have a lasting impact in an artistic field, but others do not? Write a paper examining a contemporary popular writer, such as J. K. Rowling, Stephen King, or Sherman Alexie, and discuss why that writer will or will not be considered a significant artist in the future.

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Albert Camus

BORN: 1913, Mondovi, Algeria

DIED: 1960, Paris

NATIONALITY: Algerian, French

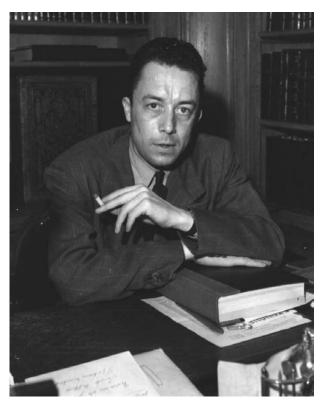
GENRE: Novels, essays, plays

MAJOR WORKS:

The Stranger (1942)

The Myth of Sisyphus (1942)

The Plague (1947)



Albert Camus Camus, Albert, photograph. AP Images.

Overview

Literary scholars hail Albert Camus (also known as Albert Mathe, Bauchart, and Saetone) as North Africa's first writer of consequence. A *pied-noir*, or French citizen born in Algeria while it was still a colony of France, Camus emerged from an underprivileged background to become one of the leading writers of the twentieth century. Trained in philosophy, Camus wrote several acclaimed plays, essays, and short stories, but is best remembered for two novels: *The Stranger* (1942) and *The Plague* (1947).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in Algeria and Parents' Impact Albert Camus was born on November 7, 1913, outside Mondovi, a village near Bône (now Annaba), in eastern Algeria, then a French territory. When World War I began in summer 1914, Camus's father was called into military service and was wounded in the Battle of the Marne. He died in a hospital in autumn 1914. The tragedy caused Camus's already reclusive mother to become even more withdrawn.

Camus's family life and his early loss of his father is reflected in his writing. In Camus's works, fathers are often missing or shadowy; only in his unfinished autobiographical novel The First Man (1994) does a father appear directly and extensively. In contrast, a mother is a recurring figure throughout Camus's work. He wrote always of his own mother with respect and devotion, often connecting her to Algeria and the sense of home. In a letter to his friend Jules Roy, Camus commented, "What justifies life is our mothers; that's why I wish to die before mine"—a wish that was, in fact, granted. Based on his writings, it can be argued that Camus was haunted by the maternal idea; the word "mother" bears considerable weight in his prose, as when it is paired with "truth" in the original French: "ma mère et ma vérité." There are suggestions, however, that the relationship between Camus and his mother was not an easy one; as Camus wrote in his Notebooks, 1942-1951 (Carnets: janvier 1942-mars 1951, 1964): "I loved my mother despairingly. I have always loved her despairingly." Clearly, Camus was somewhat torn in his feelings for his mother, or at least ambivalent. The beginning of his most famous novel, The Stranger, reflects this sort of ambivalence; it begins with the character Meursault unemotionally explaining: "Today, mother died. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: Mother dead. Funeral tomorrow. Sincere condolences. It doesn't say anything. It could have been yesterday."

Tuberculosis and the Absurdity of Life While in his early teens, Camus was an active sports enthusiast. He swam often and was an avid soccer player. However, Camus's sports activities came to a halt when, at seventeen, he contracted tuberculosis in his right lung. The

disease eventually spread to his left lung as well. With no method yet discovered of destroying the tubercle bacilli, Camus was to be afflicted with bouts of active tuberculosis on and off for the remainder of his life, making him a target for depression and respiratory illnesses. What emerged from Camus's struggle with tuberculosis was his development of his theory of the absurd. For Camus, the word *absurd* described the disparity between a young consciousness, hungry for experience and crying out for meaning, and a body condemned to illness. Camus found it absurd that he should be so full of life and curiosity while knowing that his life could soon end. As an adult, Camus would explore the absurdity of life in such novels as *The Stranger* and *The Fall* (1956).

Politics: Camus's Fight Against the Nazis By 1942, Camus had moved to Paris, where he became a part of the French resistance movement against German occupation. (The Nazi Army had marched into Paris in the summer of 1940 after easily overwhelming the French military.) He was writing The Plague and The Rebel (1951), while simultaneously writing anti-Nazi pieces for the underground newspaper Combat at night. Authors Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were also on the Combat staff. At Combat, Camus wrote clandestinely under various pseudonyms. Despite his precautions, Camus barely escaped being caught by the Nazi Gestapo (the internal security organization of the Nazi regime) at least once.

In The Plague, Camus deals with the theme of revolt. Complementing his concept of the absurd, Camus believed in the necessity of each person to revolt against the common fate of humanity by seeking personal freedom. Dr. Rieux, the protagonist of The Plague, narrates the story of several men in the plague-ridden Algerian city of Oran. Throughout the novel, Camus parallels the conflicting philosophies of Rieux and Father Paneloux over how to deal with the plague: Rieux, a compassionate humanist who repudiates conventional religion, maintains that human action can best combat the disease; Paneloux, a Jesuit priest who views the plague as God's retribution on the sinful people of Oran, holds that only through faith and divine intervention can the city be salvaged. Ultimately, the characters overcome their differences and unite to defeat the plague, at least temporarily, through scientific means. Many critics have interpreted The Plague as an allegory of the German occupation of France during World War II.

Nobel Prize Amidst Algerian Independence Controversy Following the release of The Fall in 1956, Camus's standing as a writer received a welcome boost when he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1957, especially since it came in the midst of the battle over his refusal to publicly take a side in Algeria's war for independence from France. Algeria's struggle against colonial control by France was part of a widespread independence movement in Africa and Asia. Many parts of Africa and Asia, in the years following World War II, sought to free

themselves from the political control of European countries that had dominated them for generations. Camus dedicated his Nobel acceptance speech to Louis Germain, his influential fifth-grade teacher, and in it, he attempted to explain his point of view on political struggles: "The artist fashions himself in that ceaseless oscillation from himself to others," Camus said at the ceremonies, "midway between the beauty he cannot do without and the community from which he cannot tear himself. This is why true artists scorn nothing. They force themselves to understand instead of judging."

Death in an Automobile Accident Camus had just emerged from a long-lasting writer's block, full of ideas for future writings, when he died suddenly. On January 4, 1960, Camus was killed upon impact in an automobile crash. He was forty-six years old. "News of the death stunned the French literary world of which M. Camus was one of the brightest lights," wrote the New York Times. In Francois Mauriac's words, Camus's death was "one of the greatest losses that could have affected French letters at the present time." In general, newspapers commented that it was the absurd death of a man who recognized life as absurd.

Works in Literary Context

Inspired to read widely and deeply by his high school teacher, philosopher Jean Grenier, Camus was well versed in the classics of Western philosophy, including the works of Plato, Søren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche—all of whom influenced his work.

Existentialism and the Absurd One of Camus's most famous concepts is the idea that life is absurd, an idea that one can see prominently in The Stranger and The Myth of Sisyphus. Camus's meditations on the "absurdity" of life sounded like "Existentialism" to many of his contemporaries. Existentialism is basically the belief that life in itself is meaningless and that it is only as valuable or meaningful as one makes it. Although Camus became known as an existentialist and as a philosopher, he himself rejected both labels. In Actuelles I he wrote, "I have little liking for the too famous existential philosophy, and to speak frankly, I think its conclusions are false." He further asserted in Actuelles II, "I am not a philosopher and never claimed to be one." Instead, he viewed himself as a moralist, by his own definition, "a man with a passion for the human heart." But even above being a moralist, Camus perceived himself as an artist with a responsibility to mankind. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Camus said, "In my eyes, art is not a solitary pleasure. It is a means of moving the greatest number of men by offering them a privileged image of common sufferings and common joys."

Works in Critical Context

Camus was widely acclaimed in his short lifetime, and almost all of his work—especially *The Stranger* and *The Plague* received critical praise. His philosophical work *The*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Camus's famous contemporaries include:

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): Camus's friendship with this French Existentialist philosopher and novelist ended over political differences.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986): Author of the landmark feminist work *The Second Sex* (1949), Beauvoir is also classified as a French Existentialist.

Samuel Beckett (1906–1989): The work of this Irish playwright and poet continued and enhanced Camus's concept of the absurd.

Mohamed Ahmed Ben Bella (1918–): He is considered the father of the nation of Algeria.

Charles De Gaulle (1890–1970): De Gaulle was a leader of the Free French Forces and one of the leading Nazi resistors in France.

Myth of Sisyphus was dismissed as amateurish by some critics, but it remains popular with readers.

The Stranger When The Stranger first appeared in print, Jean-Paul Sartre predicted it would become a classic. Often required reading for literature classes, The Stranger has been viewed as "one of the first modern books—perhaps the very first—in which the Absurdist awareness of the absence of any settled moral truth is worked into all the details of the story." To Henri Peyre, "the romantic condemnation of a bourgeois society whose judges sentence a murder too harshly is a little facile. But the young Camus had thus to begin by setting himself against the world as he found it; before he could discover how to change it or how to rethink it, he had to depict it as unsatisfactory." R. Barton Palmer examined the form of the novel, noting in International Fiction Review that Camus rejects the cause-and-effect plotting typical of conventional narratives and instead presents "a slice of the daily routine, devoid of intention and plot as it must be, a procession of events linked only by chronology. Event succeeds event, perception replaces perception, without any values by which the process may be interpreted."

The Plague The Plague has been viewed as Camus's "most anti-Christian" novel. To the scholar Rima Drell Reck, Camus "suggests that faith is questionable, that man's torments are unjustifiable, that religion offers no answers to the travail of quotidian existence." Although it is clear that the text is metaphorical and, indeed, intended to be allegorical, Sartre and social commentator Roland Barthes identified a flaw in Camus's allegory, observed biographer Patrick McCarthy. "Camus had asserted the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

What does it mean to be human? Does life have value or meaning in and of itself, or is life "absurd" in the sense Camus believes it to be? These questions have always plagued writers. Thinkers from the world's leading religions try to answer them, often asserting that the meaning of life has to do with one's faith, with one's religion. Other secular writers have also tried to answer such questions in these works:

The Republic (360 B.C.E.), by Plato. Plato recounts the pursuit of the good life according to Socrates, particularly as it relates to rationality and the joy one can experience by living a rational life.

Beyond Good and Evil (1886), by Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche attempts to establish the meaning of life outside of the realm of traditional, religious morality.

The Pursuit of Happiness (1930), by Bertrand Russell. Russell, like Socrates, tries to introduce a way of making one's life meaningful by following reason; however, the two thinkers reach very different conclusions.

need to act but he had not treated the more difficult problems of which action one chooses....[T]he occupation was far from nonhuman [unlike Camus's fictional plague] and it involved agonizing choices." Nonetheless, many agree with Philip Thoddy that *The Plague* is Camus's "most complex and probably his most satisfying work."

The Myth of Sisyphus While many readers who first encounter The Myth of Sisyphus (Le Mythe de Sisyphe) (1942) are impressed by Camus as a thinker, his standing among professional philosophers and intellectuals was from the beginning much lower than his reputation among literary critics. Disparaging remarks made by Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir—the chief proponents of French existentialism later contributed to the trend. Perhaps anticipating future criticism as well as defending himself against contemporary attacks, Camus often said that he was an artist or a moralist, not a philosopher. Left-wing intellectuals have not ceased attacking The Myth of Sisyphus, in The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (1987), Hayden White mocked Camus for "opposing 'totalitarianism' and holding up the prospect of an amiable anarchy as a desirable alternative." Nonetheless, selections from The Myth of Sisyphus were included in Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre (1956), a major mid-century anthology edited by Walter Kaufmann.

Responses to Literature

1. Research the definition and etymology of the word "sociopathy" using your library and the Internet.

- Considering Camus's view of absurdity, write a definitional essay in which you argue whether Meursault should or should not be considered a sociopath.
- 2. Epicurus argues that, while life is not meaningful in itself, there is no reason why it cannot be enjoyable. In *Letter to Menoeceus*, Epicurus discusses how the most important—the most meaningful—aspect of life is happiness and that one should pursue those activities that bring one the most happiness. Epicurus especially advocated the appreciation of food as a way to happiness. Script a conversation among Epicurus, Camus, and Meursault in which each person argues against the other people's philosophies of life.
- 3. Camus always writes in the first-person point of view. What effect does the use of the first person point of view have on the text? How would Camus's work be different if he used a different point of view?

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Elias Canetti

BORN: 1905, Russe, Bulgaria

DIED: 1994, Zurich
NATIONALITY: Swiss
GENRE: Novels, plays

MAJOR WORKS:

Auto-da-fé (1935–1936) Crowds and Power (1960) The Tongue Set Free: Remembrances of a European Childhood (1977)

Overview

In 1981, Bulgarian-born author Elias Canetti received the Nobel Prize for Literature for his body of work that crossed many disciplines and contained insights and analyses of crowd dynamics and obsessive behaviors. His best-known books are *Auto-da-fé* (1935–1936) and *Crowds and Power* (1960).

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Eastern European Roots Elias Jacques Canetti was born in Russe, Bulgaria, on July 25, 1905, the oldest of the three sons of Sephardic merchant Jacques Canetti and his wife, Mathilde, née Arditti. The Canettis and the Ardittis were descendants of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. Many of these Jews had settled in countries in eastern Europe. While the Jewish population in Bulgaria was small relative to other eastern European countries, Jews had a special status there with much self-administration led by a chief rabbi. Mathilde Canetti, the most influential person in her son's childhood and adolescence, used her enthusiasm for literature, notably dramas and novels, as a medium for Elias's education and inspired him to become an author and intellectual.

At home, Canetti's family spoke Ladino, the language of the Sephardim in the Balkan states and around the Mediterranean. Ladino is derived from medieval Spanish and contains elements of Hebrew and non-Jewish languages. In addition, Canetti was exposed to Bulgarian, Hebrew, Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Armenian, Romanian, and Russian. His parents spoke German with one another as their intimate language and as a code when they did not want their children to understand what they were saying. The German language thus assumed a special fascination for the young Canetti, and he later adopted the language for his intellectual and literary pursuits.

Literature at Heart of British Education When Canetti was six years old, his father escaped the oppressive situation of working in a family business in a small eastern European town by joining his brother-in-law's business in Manchester, England, then still a center of industry as it had been since the late eighteenth-century beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. Mathilde Canetti welcomed the move. She was eager to remove her children from the influence of her Orthodox in-laws, and she liked England because of its democratic tradition. Young Elias learned English without difficulty and was able to start school.

In Manchester, his father introduced him to literature and the life of the imagination, discussing what the boy read, including *The Arabian Nights* Grimm's fairy tales, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719–1722), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), tales from William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615), the works of Dante, and Friedrich von Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* (1804). He later said that he was grateful to his father for never telling him that fairy tales were untrue

Moved to Continent after Father's Death In October 1912, Jacques Canetti died unexpectedly of a heart attack. Around the same time, the Balkan Wars of 1912 to 1913 began, posing an increasing threat to the families in Bulgaria. The wars were fought in eastern Europe over who would control the balance of power in the area as

the Ottoman Empire reached its final decline. Unable to tolerate life with her husband's brothers, Mathilde Canetti moved the family to Vienna in May 1913. Convinced that Elias was destined to become a prominent author, his mother encouraged him in his intellectual aspirations.

In 1916, the family moved again to Zurich, Switzerland, to avoid the ravages of World War I. Caused by increased tensions in the Balkans, entangling alliances, and the final catalyst of the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand, the so-called Great War enveloped nearly the whole of Europe in the mid- to late 1910s and saw massive loss of life. Despite the horrors of the conflict, the Swiss capital was a safe haven for Canetti during his formative years. At the age of fourteen, he completed his first literary work, a historical tragedy titled "Junius Brutus."

Much to Canetti's dismay, in 1921, Mathilde Canetti moved to Frankfurt with her sons. Frankfurt introduced Canetti to the harsh postwar reality in the defeated Germany as the country was forced to pay harsh reparations as well as lose territory and admit guilt for starting the war. The economic terms of peace had a disastrous effect on the German economy. Canetti was shocked by the effects of inflation when he saw an old woman die of hunger in the street. In 1922, another event, a mass demonstration against the murder of the Jewish politician and industrialist Walter Rathenau by German racists because of his heritage, revealed to Canetti the power of a crowd.

Chemistry Abandoned in Favor of Literature In 1924, Canetti enrolled at the University of Vienna as a student of chemistry to satisfy his mother's wish that he establish himself in a lucrative profession. His actual interest being literature, he immediately came under the influence of Karl Kraus, Vienna's great satirist and polemicist, editor and to a large extent sole author of the famous journal the *Torch*. At his first Kraus lecture, Canetti met his future wife, Venetiana (Veza) Taubner-Calderon.

In 1928, frustrated by his studies and troubled by the July 1927 riots in Vienna over the dismissal of a court case against a right-wing party member accused of killing two socialists in an earlier riot, Canetti went to Berlin with his friend Ibby Gordon, who introduced him to members of the literary and artistic avant-garde. In 1929, Canetti completed his chemistry doctorate in Vienna, but he never worked as a chemist. That same year, he began writing *Auto-da-fé*. Two years before *Auto-da-fé* was published, in February 1934, Canetti married Taubner-Calderon against his mother's wishes. His wife was an author in her own right. She had published a social-critical serial novel, *The Yellow Street* (1934), as well as short stories.

Wrote in Exile Canetti and his wife were only able to remain in Vienna for a few years because of the threat of the Nazis. In the years after World War I, Germany's

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Canetti's famous contemporaries include:

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945): German politician and leader of the Nazi Party who led Germany during World War II. **William Butler Yeats** (1865–1939): Irish poet and playwright who won the 1923 Nobel Prize for Literature for his poetry, including *The Tower* (1928) and *The Winding Stair, and Other Poems* (1929).

Albert Einstein (1879–1955): German-born scientist and writer who developed the theory of relativity and won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921.

Joseph Stalin (1879–1953): Autocratic leader of the Soviet Union who held a stranglehold on power until his demise

Helen Keller (1890–1968): U.S. writer, feminist, and socialist. The deaf and blind author inspired many with her books and life story.

economic recovery had lagged. When Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich took power in the early 1930s with promises of a better Germany, the country soon became prosperous again. His plan included rebuilding Germany's military. Hitler used the army to secure his total power, and by the mid-1930s he was in control of the country. As Hitler began enacting his plan to take control of more territory in Europe, he also enacted in 1935 the Nuremberg Laws, which suspended the civil liberties of Jews.

Nazi Germany took control of Austria in 1938, and the Canettis left Vienna that November, fortunate to have been able to procure the necessary documents. They first went to Paris and from there to England, where they eventually took a modest apartment in the London suburb of Hampstead. Great Britain was a haven for exiles from Europe for much of World War II as one of the few countries not allied with or controlled by Nazi Germany.

Focus on Nonfiction In his London exile in the 1940s, Canetti worked on his major work of nonfiction, Crowds and Power (1960). The impetus for this ambitious study can be traced back to July 15, 1927, when Canetti observed the dynamics governing the crowd setting fire to the Palace of Justice during the Vienna riots.

To counterbalance the concentration required by his monumental project on crowds and power, Canetti took up writing his *Aufzeichnungen* ("notebooks") in the 1940s. Canetti's aphorisms and diaristic entries include incisive observations and insights on a broad range of topics, including different cultural myths, languages, wars and revolutions, Jewish history and experience, crowds and power, and individual authors and events. Eventually,

the Aufzeichnungen covered the years from 1942 to 1992 and were published in several volumes.

Nobel Prize Winner After the death of his first wife in 1963 and remarriage to art restorer Hera Buschor in 1971, Canetti had acquired an apartment in Zurich and had begun living alternately in Hampstead and Zurich. He continued to write, primarily nonfiction. In 1977, he published his autobiography, The Tongue Set Free: Remembrance of a European Childhood. Winning the Nobel Prize in 1981 made Canetti financially independent for the first time in his life. Though he still lived modestly, primarily in Zurich, he was in demand as an author and lecturer and published two books at the end of his life: The Secret Heart of the Clock: Notes, Aphorisms, Fragments, 1973–1985 and The Agony of Flies (1992), a collection of sketches, notes, and aphorisms. Canetti died in Zurich on August 14, 1994.

Works in Literary Context

Transcending traditional boundaries of genre and discipline, Canetti's literary and nonliterary texts are structurally and intellectually interconnected; they function as a complex and idiosyncratic network of ideas that call into question "big" systems such as Marxism, capitalism, and fascism.

Psychological Imbalance The most fascinating aspect of *Auto-da-fé* is the meticulous development of the main characters' psychological imbalance. Kien, Therese, Fischerle, Pfaff, and even Georg, suffer from their own brand of madness. The unveiling of each particular form of madness is carried out with great subtlety. In his only major work of fiction, a novel written at the age of twenty-five, Canetti exhibits an unusual mastery of storytelling.

Crowd Dynamics The impetus for this ambitious study, Crowds and Power, can be traced back to July 15, 1927, when Canetti observed the dynamics governing the crowd setting fire to the Palace of Justice in Vienna. Other experiences with crowd behavior, notably the seemingly inexplicable power that political leaders such as Adolf Hitler had over the masses in Nazi Germany, compelled Canetti to examine the origins, makeup, and behavior of crowds in a vast array of social settings and cultures.

Works in Critical Context

Canetti was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981 for "writings marked by a broad outlook, a wealth of ideas and artistic power." Even prior to this turning point in his career, Canetti had attracted a small but loyal following among Austrian, British, German, and American intellectuals without, however, being a "popular" writer.

Auto-da-fé Canetti's first novel follows a world-renowned scholar of Chinese culture, Peter Kien, whose life revolves around his library of twenty-five thousand books. When

published, the novel was well received by some critics and received praise from Hermann Broch, Alban Berg, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, and Hermann Hesse. After the Nazi takeover of Austria in 1938, all publication venues there were closed to oppositional and Jewish writers, and the Nuremberg racial laws took effect. Distributing *Auto-da-fé* on the German-speaking market was impossible, leaving Canetti's book untouchable. When the novel was translated into English after World War II, many critics and reviewers initially labeled the work "too difficult." Little effort was made to promote the translation, and it soon went out of print.

Later critics of Auto-da-fé, as well as Crowds and Power, praised their insight into individual and mass psychology. In discussions of Auto-da-fé, some critics have complained that Canetti's characterization is superficial. Furthermore, they argue, the world of invariably deranged personalities depicted in Canetti's novel bears little resemblance to actual life. With the exception of Kien, the characters do not evolve, while Kien himself sinks into insanity before finally destroying himself. A particular point of objection to the novel is that none of its characters comes to any realization of his or her folly, and the reader is ultimately offered only a biting satire of dementia. In addition, critics describe the structure of Auto-da-fé as difficult because the narrative perspective shifts without transition or explanation from the viewpoint of one character to another or to an omniscient narrator.

Nevertheless, many commentators praise the book for its treatment of the dual nature of human beings as both individuals and members of a group. Critics observe that Canetti's portrayal of a world populated by cruel, obsessive personalities accurately reflects European society in the 1920s and 1930s, and his complex narrative technique provides a penetrating understanding of the characters' psychopathy.

Crowds and Power As with Auto-da-fé, many commentators consider Crowds and Power a flawed work, observing that its scholarship is unscientific and that the book advances assertions without the support of arguments or scientific proof. Moreover, critics maintain that without supporting arguments, readers have little reason to believe some of the premises on which Canetti grounds his explanation of crowds and crowd behavior.

Responses to Literature

- 1. In *Auto-da-fé*, Peter Kien obsesses over his library. In what ways is this obsession similar or different from the obsessions of the other characters? Research obsessive behaviors and determine what characteristics Kien exhibits and which ones he does not. What does it mean to have an obsession?
- 2. Give an overview of Canetti's concept of group dynamics and mass psychology. Choose a recent incident of group dynamics (a mass demonstration, riot, sports team celebration) and examine the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Canetti was profoundly intrigued by the power of group dynamics. Here are a number of other works that explore the workings of crowds.

"The Lottery" (1948), a short story by Shirley Jackson. This horrifying short story explores what happens when a mother is chosen for the town's ritual stoning.

"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1974), a short story by Ursula K. LeGuin. In this short story, the unthinking happiness of the town depends on the misery of one poor child.

Do the Right Thing (1989), a film directed by Spike Lee. In this movie, racial tensions run high on a hot day in New York City, and a series of irritations cause a full-scale riot.

behaviors through Canetti's perspective. Do Canetti's observations still hold true today?

- 3. Canetti was exposed to and spoke a wide variety of languages during his childhood and chose to write in German. Explore the role of language and words in Canetti's development as a writer.
- 4. In what ways did the events leading up to and including World War II affect Canetti and his work? What are some of the tactics that writers tend to use to reflect the history of their time? Does Canetti's style or content give you some idea of what were the trouble spots in history during his time?

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■ Karel Capek

BORN: 1890, Male Svatonovice, Bohemia DIED: 1938, Prague, Czechoslovakia

NATIONALITY: Czech GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS: Rossum's Universal Robots

(1921)

The Absolute at Large (1922) An Atomic Phantasy (1924) War with the Newts (1936)

Overview

Karel Capek is regarded as the most important Czech writer before World War II. He worked in many capacities: He was a man of the theater, a translator, a journalist, an essayist, a fiction writer, and an organizer of cultural activities. His views tended toward tolerant democracy and practical humanism, and he subscribed to the ideology of the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) and to the views of its first president, Tomás Garrigue Masaryk. Despite his broad body of work, his most lasting contribution to international culture has proven to be a single word he coined for one of his plays: "robot."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life in Bohemia Karel Capek was born in Malé Svatonovice in northeastern Bohemia on January 9, 1890. His father, Antonín Capek, was a doctor who came from a family of farmers. His mother, Bozena Capek, collected folklore. The Capek children were all artistically gifted: Karel's sister, Helena, published several books, and his brother, Josef, was a well-known artist, fiction writer, and dramatist. Karel and Josef wrote several stories and plays together.

As a child Capek began showing a talent for science and art. From 1901 to 1905 he attended the grammar school at Hradec Králové, where he was an excellent pupil. He had to leave, however, when it was discovered that he was a member of a secret anarchist society; anarchists support the idea of society operating without a formal governing body, which allows for complete liberty of its citizens. He continued his schooling in Brno and Prague, finishing in 1909. Between 1909 and 1915 he was a student at Charles University in Prague, where he studied philosophy and aesthetics as well as French, German, and English philology. For eight months during 1910–1911 he took time off to visit the universities of Berlin and Paris, the latter with Josef. While they were in Paris they both became familiar with avant-garde art, particularly cubism and futurism, and after they returned home, they were instrumental in making these forms more widely known. In 1911, with other young artists, they founded the Society of Painters and Artists, which published a magazine



Karel Capek Capek, Karel, photograph. AP Images.

titled *Art Monthly*. In 1913 they organized the *Almanac for the Year 1914*. During this period, between 1908 and 1912, the short pieces that comprise *Krakonos's Garden* were published in magazines. (The collection did not appear in book form until 1918.)

World War I These avant-garde efforts were interrupted by World War I. Members of the avant-garde expressed admiration for technologically advances but distrust of the dangerous powers of technology, the unheeding egoism of the capitalist world, and revolutionary, violent ideologies, especially communism and later fascism, that attempted to establish a new world order and a new kind of man. During the war Capek began to show signs of spondylitis, a serious disease of the spine that was initially diagnosed as terminal and that affected him for many years. In his work he began to explore man's inner nature and other epistemological and metaphysical questions, as he did in the important collection of stories Wayside Crosses. These stories always start out with a mystery that cannot be explained rationally—for instance, a solitary footprint in the snow or the disappearance of a young girl. Such mysteries lead the heroes toward a search for the truth, which transcends everyday experience. Capek's philosophy was inspired by AngloAmerican pragmatism, which he discussed in *Pragmatism: A Philosophy of Practical Life*. This philosophy had its roots in tolerance and humanism, which he actively supported in his writings and in his positive work ethic.

Then Invention of "Robot" In the 1920s Capek, at the height of his creative powers, began to win world fame as a dramatist. His most renowned work was the fantasy play R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots), published in 1920 and first performed in January 1921 as an amateur production. A few days later it was performed in the National Theatre. In the same year, it was performed in Germany, and in 1922 there were productions in Warsaw, Belgrade in Serbia, and New York; by then it had been translated into thirty languages. Capek was the first to use the word "robot" (from the Czech word robota, meaning labor or drudgery) to mean an artificially constructed being, similar to a man but devoid of any kind of creativity or feeling. In R.U.R. the robots, basically modern slaves, increase in numbers throughout the world and gradually take over all human tasks. Meanwhile, however, because they are condemned to inactivity, humans become sterile and lose their natural position in the world. Finally the robots rise in revolt, slaughter the human beings, and seize power. This turn of events seems to seal the fate of humanity, for the robots are not capable of reproduction. In the end, however, human feelings of love and self-sacrifice appear unexpectedly among the robots, and the play ends on a note of hope for the future.

Czechoslovakian Politics When the independent state of Czechoslovakia was established in 1918 as one of the end results of World War I, Capek was deeply involved from the beginning in public and cultural life. Between 1921 and 1924 he was producer and repertory adviser for the Vinohrady Theatre in Prague. He was one of the founders and the first president of the Czech PEN Club, representing it at the world forum. In his apartment in Prague he organized gatherings of "The Friday Club," a kind of debating society for intellectuals of all political affiliations; even President Jan Masaryk, whom Capek admired and whose views he adopted, attended these debates. As a result of his association with Masaryk, Capek wrote President Masaryk Tells His Story and its continuation, The Silences of T. G. Masaryk, exploring Masaryk's life and setting out his philosophical and political ideas.

Capek's Later Years

Capek's literary work reached its peak with the novels *Hordubal* (1933), *MeteorPovetron* (1934), and *An Ordinary Life* (1936). These novels form a loose trilogy concerned with questions of morality and the limits of human knowledge. Defense of democracy forms the background to all of Capek's work between the wars, particularly after 1933 when Czechoslovakia was threatened by Adolf Hitler's Germany. This concern is evident

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Capek's famous contemporaries include:

- Irving Berlin (1888–1989): This Russian-born composer became an American citizen and wrote important songs like "God Bless America" and "There's No Business Like Show Business."
- H. G. Wells (1866–1946): This English author wrote some of the seminal works of science fiction, a genre that Capek would later take up and help reach its full potential.
- **Sinclair Lewis** (1885–1951): This American author of *Main Street* and *Elmer Gantry* became the first American to earn the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1930.
- Manfred von Richthofen (1892–1918): This German fighter pilot is better known as "The Red Baron." He was a very successful pilot who brought down approximately eighty other planes during World War I.
- **Satyendra Nath Bose** (1894–1974): This Indian Bengali physicist played an integral role in the development of quantum mechanics.
- **Karl von Frisch** (1886–1982): This Austrian zoologist won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1973, primarily for his work on communication among insects.

in his journalism—in his series of essays on the position and duty of intellectuals, for example—and in his literary works, in which once again he resorted to fantasy subjects. In the novel *War with the Newts* (1937) and in the drama *Power and Glory* (1938), he again envisages a catastrophe for civilization and asks who is responsible for it. Capek is also more pessimistic than in his earlier writing; both works finish without any hope of a solution.

By the Munich Agreement in the autumn of 1938, France and Britain agreed to German occupation of Czech border territories. Capek was bitterly disappointed at the capitulation of the democratic world. The first republic of Czechoslovakia, with which he had been in close sympathy ideologically, had collapsed. Capek died in Prague on December 25, 1938, after a short illness.

Works in Literary Context

Although there had been writers before Capek who could be described as having written a kind of early science fiction, no writer was more important for the development of the genre than Capek. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the genre without the robots that so often inhabit the books of that genre. As such, writers like Harlan Ellison, whose cyborgs inspired the *Terminator* films, and Isaac Asimov, who developed the Three Laws of Robotics in his text *I*, *Robot*, are deeply indebted to the author.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Artists and authors often find accidents and illnesses—either ones they themselves suffer from or ones that a loved one struggles with—inspirational, particularly when the illness is terminal or thought to be terminal, as in Capek's case. Here are some examples of texts that deal with the life-changing effects of accidents and illnesses:

The Dive from Clausen's Pier (2002), a novel by Ann Packer. This novel follows the reaction of friends and family to an accident that leaves a young man crippled. Meditations from a Moveable Chair (1998), a work of nonfiction by Andre Dubus. Dubus wrote this collection of essays after he was struck by a car while trying to help a motorist on the side of the road. After his accident, Dubus—formerly a very active man—was confined to a wheelchair and suffered intense periods of depression. Tuesdays with Morrie (1997), a memoir by Mitch Albom. In this text, Albom recounts the last months of one of his professors, who suffered from Lou Gehrig's disease.

Science Fiction Capek based many works on fantastic catastrophes, notably the novels The Absolute at Large and An Atomic Phantasy. In An Atomic Phantasy young engineer Prokop invents an explosive capable of destroying the world. Only when his discovery is misused does he realize his responsibility. At the same time, he falls in love with more than one woman, with an equally explosive force. Two works in a similar vein are the play The Makropulos Secret and Adam the Creator, the latter written in collaboration with his brother. The Makropulos Secret was first performed in 1922. It deals with the possible immortality of man and inspired Leos Janácek's world-famous opera of the same title in 1926. Adam the Creator is about the destruction of the "old" world and the emergence of "new" man.

With these works Capek became a pioneer of science fiction in literature. The attractive fantasy worlds of his plays, however, did not lead the author into sensationalism; he used them to pose universal human and moral questions. Capek puts a high value on "everyday normality" and on an approach to life that is unpretentious and constructive. It is truly in this light that the science fiction genre receives its best reading. While the genre is often misconstrued as describing a simply fantastical version of this or some other world, what the genre often addresses is essentially the problems of mankind—not just social but also personal.

Works in Critical Context

Today, critical evaluation of Capek's work focuses primarily on his role as the progenitor of modern science

fiction, embodying the important step that the genre needed to take to get from H. G. Wells and other seminal science fiction writers to the force it is now. However, there was a time when Capek's work was commented upon primarily for its political meanings, not its revolutionary use of images, mysteries, and fantasy. Indeed, little remains of the traditional literary criticism that Capek received during his lifetime. The success of his plays and their production in many, diverse countries—particularly *Rossum's Universal Robots*—demonstrates his popularity.

The impact of the Nazi opposition to Capek's views had a long-lasting effect on how his work was interpreted through the years. During the German occupation and again after the Communist takeover of 1948 Karel Capek was an author seldom published and not well respected. The democratic values he defended were at odds with the totalitarian regimes of fascism and communism. Things changed slightly after the publication of Sergei V. Nikolski's Soviet study, in which he interpreted Capek as a friend of the Soviet Union and a writer who came near to being Communist in the 1930s. This perspective made it possible to publish Capek's books more widely, with the omission of some parts, but to a certain extent it also misrepresented his ideas and work. It was not until after 1989, with the fall of the Communist regimes in Czechoslovakia and in Eastern Europe as a whole, that change came and his work could be published without distortion. In this way, politics became the most powerful comment upon Capek's body of work, virtually rendering traditional-honest, fair, and objective-commentary impossible.

R.U.R. Capek's play *R.U.R.* was the subject of immediate and almost unanimous international praise as it opened across Europe and the United States. When it premiered in New York, a reviewer for the *New York Herald* called it "murderous social satire done in terms of the most hair-raising melodrama." A review in the *Evening Sun* praises the way "the dramatist frees his imagination and lets it soar away without restraint, and his audience is only too delighted to go along on a trip that exceeds even Jules Verne's wildest dreams." The *Evening Post* called the play "a veritable novelty full of brains and purpose."

Responses to Literature

1. Capek did not live to see the development of the atomic bomb, much less to see it used in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan, in August 1945, but his work predicted weapons of mass destruction. In your opinion, what would Capek have to say about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? In forming your response, keep in mind that the goal of these bombings was to end World War II.

- 2. Read *Rossum's Universal Robots*. How is Capek's depiction of robots different from the way we view them today?
- 3. In Capek's fiction, he envisions a world in which the widespread use of robots essentially makes humans ineffectual—unable to do the tasks necessary to survive. In a short essay, discuss whether or not this vision seems plausible.
- 4. Read *War with the Newts*. In your opinion, does Captain von Toch take advantage of the newts? Support your response with examples from the text.

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Peter Carey

BORN: 1943, Victoria, Australia NATIONALITY: Australian

GENRE: Fiction

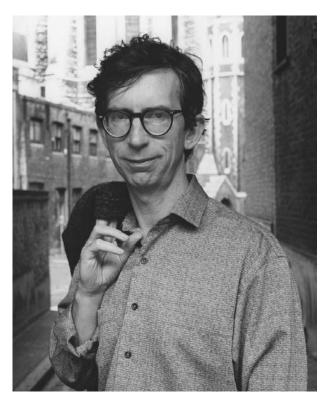
MAJOR WORKS:

Oscar and Lucinda (1987)

True History of the Kelly Gang (2000)

Overview

Peter Carey's novels and short-story collections have won virtually every major literary award in Australia. He also



Peter Carey Carey, Peter, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

has won two Booker Prizes, in 1988 and 2001—a feat equaled only by the South African writer J. M. Coetzee. Though he has been living in New York since 1989, Carey describes himself as an Australian writer, and his books explore the constraints and possibilities specific to Australian history and culture.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Beginnings Without Conclusions Peter Carey was born in Bacchus Marsh, Victoria, Australia, on May 7, 1943, to Percival Stanley and Helen Jean Carey, automobile dealers. In 1961 he began a science degree at Monash University but abandoned it in 1962 to work as an advertising copywriter. He married Leigh Weetman in 1964; the couple would separate in 1973.

Between 1964 and 1970, Carey wrote three novels that were not published, but was able to publish his first short stories. From 1967 to 1970, Carey lived in London and traveled extensively in Europe. From 1970 to 1973, he worked in advertising in Melbourne, Australia, and wrote in his spare time, completing a fourth novel, which was accepted for publication but was withdrawn by Carey before going to print. These early years were marked for Carey by a series of partial commitments, investments in both his personal and literary life that never quite came to fruition.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carey's famous contemporaries include:

Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1945–1982): German filmmaker, influential in the New German Cinema movement; many of his films examine the influence of power in human relationships.

Doris Kearns Goodwin (1943–): American historian, well-known for her biographies of U.S. presidents Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and Lyndon Johnson, as well as the Kennedy political dynasty; awarded the Pulitzer Prize for History in 1995.

Les Murray (1938–): Australian poet, critic, and translator; openly inspired by Australia, his work gives voice to previously unheard aspects of the culture.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920–1993): Australian Aboriginal poet, writer, and political activist; she was the first Aboriginal Australian to publish a book of poetry.

Patrick White (1912–1990): Australian novelist who used shifting viewpoints and stream of consciousness in his fiction; awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973.

Succeeding at Lying Carey's first major publication, the short-story collection The Fat Man in History, appeared in 1974. Most of the stories in this collection portray individuals who experience sudden anxieties when they encounter surreal events in ordinary situations. In other stories, Carey satirizes the effects of technology and foreign influences on Australian culture and society. War Crimes (1979), his next short-story collection, attracted favorable critical attention and won Carey his first literary prize; there, Carey responds not to the Australian presence in the war in Vietnam, but rather to some of the worst excesses of capitalist exploitation on "the home front." Bliss, his first published novel, was released in 1981. It portrays advertising as a dangerously addictive art form that colonizes and usurps the social roles of storytelling and mythmaking. The main character, an advertising executive named Harry Joy, reflects Carey's many years of experience working in the advertising industry, which included the cocreation of his own advertising agency in 1980.

Carey married Alison Margaret Summers in 1985, the same year his novel *Illywhacker* (1985) was nominated for the Booker Prize. The central focus of *Illywhacker* is the art of lying; the main character lies constantly in order to survive and improve his life, and Carey employs lying as a metaphor for writing fiction. Certainly, at this point, Carey had himself achieved an important degree of success in "the art of lying": first as an adman, and now as a novelist.

Negotiating Australia from New York Carey's novel Oscar and Lucinda (1987) was awarded the Booker

Prize in 1988. The novel portrays the odd romance between Carey's eccentric title characters, who are drawn together by their passion for gambling. As in *Illywhacker*, Carey endeavors in *Oscar and Lucinda* to reimagine Australian history. In particular, he responds to the outrages committed against the Aboriginal peoples inhabiting Australia long before the arrival of English adventurers and ne'er-do-wells.

In 1989, Carey moved to Greenwich Village in New York. *The Tax Inspector*, begun in Australia and completed in New York, was published in 1991. It sets a grimly detailed account of three generations of incest in the Catchprice family against a broader account of public corruption in Sydney, Australia. Carey's next novel, *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1995), concerns themes of national and cultural identity. The novel's protagonist is a citizen of Efica, an imaginary island nation that loosely resembles Australia. Efica has been colonized and exploited by Voorstand, a colossal world power based more or less on the United States.

Carey's novel *Jack Maggs* (1997) is a rewriting of the story of Abel Magwitch, the convict in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860–1861). Here, Carey renegotiates the cultural dominance of England and its greatest writer over Australia, which was founded as a penal colony for British convicts.

Outlaws and Activists: Recent Perspectives Despite living in the United States, Carey still taps into the cultural heritage of his native land for many of his works. The author created a fictional autobiography of one of the most celebrated folk heroes of Australia in True History of the Kelly Gang (2000); the novel was a runaway best seller and won Carey his second Booker Prize.

Throughout his career Carey has fictionalized Australia from a variety of perspectives and historical and allegorical distance. The mirror he holds up to late-twentieth-century Australian society and culture, and its international context, never simply reflects. It distorts, and it is designed to allow Carey's readers to see the country, its culture, and its myths as if for the first time. Since 2003 Carey has served as director of the graduate program in creative writing at New York City's Hunter College while continuing to write. His 2008 novel *His Illegal Self* follows a young boy in search of his radical activist parents, on the now-familiar path from New York to Australia. Incorporated here are ever more urgent questions about the nature of belonging and the imperatives of citizenship, along with a search for something like truth.

Works in Literary Context

Beyond Realism Peter Carey's early stories were influenced by science fiction, and his early novels by the modernist fiction of William Faulkner and the magic realism of Gabriel García Márquez. Although the short story occupies a distinguished position in Australian literary

history, Peter Carey was not writing within that tradition. His introduction to literature came during his training as an advertising writer, and his work responds more to the classics of world literature than to his Australian contemporaries. Like the stories of Franz Kafka, Milan Kundera, and J. G. Ballard, Carey's parables of imprisonment and change upset traditional constructions of fictional reality. The voice these stories articulate was a new one when Carey first began publishing, unlike anything previously heard in Australian fiction.

De-Mythologizing Australia Carey's more recent work has explored real and imagined episodes from Australian history, and mythology from a variety of revisionist perspectives, while maintaining a strong sympathy for, and identification with, the victims rather than the victors of history. His talents for placing extraordinary events in mundane contexts and for exposing the absurd and corrupt aspects of everyday life have drawn extensive praise from critics and comparison to such writers as Márquez, Samuel Beckett, and Jorge Luis Borges. Summarizing Carey's writing, A. J. Hassall has stated: "Like Beckett and Kafka...and also like [English satirist Jonathan] Swift, Carey defamiliarizes the stories from which 'reality' is constructed, exposing absurdities and corruptions so familiar that they customarily pass unnoticed and unchallenged." While this places him firmly within the tradition of authors trying to achieve what German playwright Bertolt Brecht called the Verfremdungseffekt or "alienation effect," it also puts him on the side of social theorists who have, in recent years, sought to revise or do away with racist mythologies of national origin. That is, in offering new perspectives on Australian history, Carey has pushed readers to see more clearly the tragedies and oppression that began centuries ago and that remain in play in certain ways right up to the present day.

Works in Critical Context

Commentators have often described Carey's works as metafictional—that is, fiction that deals with creating fiction. Two of his novels, Bliss and Illywhacker, for instance, deal explicitly with telling stories and the relationship between truth and fiction. Scholars have noted that Carey typically attacks the reader's sense of narrative coherence, order, time, and sequence by providing conflicting versions of his narratives. Arguing that Carey views history as an act of selection, Graeme Turner has stated that Carey's "fantastic, alternative worlds...can always be seen as alternative perspectives on an historical world, questioning it and exposing its constructed, arbitrary nature." This line of thought also influences the direction Carey takes in his exploration of individual characters. Turner argues that Carey's novels and stories "do not examine what lives mean as much as they examine how lives are constructed in order to produce their meanings."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Metafiction is a stylistic technique that involves the author commenting on the story-making process even as he or she tells a story. The author asks questions about fiction and reality—what is the difference? Who determines it? Here are some other works of metafiction:

"Elbow Room" (1977), a short story by James Alan McPherson. This short story, from the collection of the same title and by the first African American man to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, is about a biracial couple and their struggling relationship, as told by a writer friend of theirs; the friend's editor interrupts his tale with comments and requests for clarification, making the process of storytelling highly visible.

The Eyre Affair (2003), a novel by Jasper Fforde. Jane Eyre is kidnapped out of the book Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë and being held for ransom. Tuesday Next, literary detective, must cross over into the fictional world and rescue her.

The Life of Pi (2003), a novel by Yann Martel. In this award-winning book, an Indian boy named Pi is stranded on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger; the author introduces himself as a character and claims to have actually met the other characters in the novel.

The Matrix (1999), a film directed by Larry and Andy Wachowski. In this science fiction movie, a man discovers that the world as he knows it is nothing but a computer simulation, created by machines that use humans as their energy source.

"Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning" (1968), a short story by Donald Barthelme. This short story presents twenty-four short images of Robert Kennedy, the American politician and brother of the assassinated president; each short section presents a different version, reflecting the difficulty in truly knowing a public figure. (Robert Kennedy himself was assassinated a few months after this story was first published.)

Carey's fiction is about much more than simply its own creation, however. As Robert Towers has noted, "Carey's prose can hold the ugly, the frightening, and the beautiful in uncanny suspension. It is this gift, among others, that makes him such a strong and remarkable writer." That is, his talent lies in the ability to sustain true conflict, to understand and to communicate that a number of contradictory narratives—lies, even—can all be true at once.

True History of the Kelly Gang Although Carey had enjoyed a certain amount of critical success prior to the publication of *True History of the Kelly Gang* in 2000, it was this novel that brought his greatest renown and made

him an internationally best-selling author. Critical response was overwhelmingly positive, with much attention focusing on Carey's attempt at an authentic voice for his narrator, the infamous Australian criminal Ned Kelly, based on a letter the man wrote a year before he was executed in 1880. Douglas Ivison, in a review for the Journal of Australian Studies, calls Carey's narrative voice "a remarkable achievement" that is "simultaneously poetic and authentic; vernacular and idiomatic without being condescending or sentimental; ungrammatical and randomly punctuated but yet highly readable." Ivison does note, however, that the book paints Kelly as more of a romantic hero than a criminal, and he states, "The contradictions in Kelly's character, and in the socio-political role played by the Kelly gang, go largely unexamined." Robert Ross, in a review for World and I, observes that the novel treads the same territory as much of Carey's previous work—a search for a national Australian identity—but concludes, "If he is indeed writing the same novel again and again, he has done so with flair and infinite variety."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Peter Carey has said that lying is a metaphor for fiction. What does this mean? Explain your understanding with reference to Carey's own work. To what extent do you agree with him? How does this fit or contrast with the popular idea that fiction can serve as a route to the truth?
- 2. Former British prime minister Winston Churchill once said, "History is written by the victors." How does Carey's work serve to support or refute this statement?
- 3. In *True History of the Kelly Gang*, Carey based his writing style on the Jerilderie Letter, an actual letter written by the real Ned Kelly. Using your library or the Internet, find and read a copy of this letter and compare it to Carey's writing style in the novel. What characteristics can you find that Carey borrowed from the letter? In your opinion, did Carey create an authentic version of Ned Kelly's writing style? Is that the same as creating an "authentic version" of Ned Kelly himself? Why or why not?
- 4. Australia was settled by Europeans in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, with many of the colonists being convicts or outsiders who had difficulty succeeding in Great Britain. How is this "outsider identity" expressed and challenged in Carey's writing? Provide examples from at least one of his novels.

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■ Thomas Carlyle

BORN: 1795, Ecclefechan, Scotland DIED: 1881, London, England

NATIONALITY: Scottish GENRE: Nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

German Romance (1827)

Sartor Resartus (1836)

The French Revolution: A History (1837)

On Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History (1841)

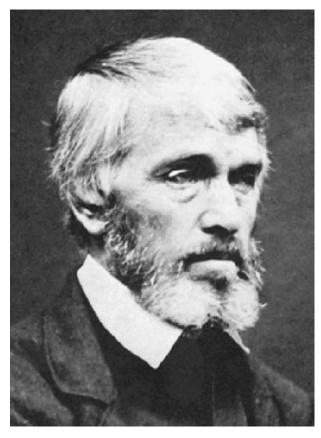
History of Friedrich II of Prussia, called Frederick the Great (1858–1865)

Overview

Thomas Carlyle was an important biographer, historian, and essayist of the nineteenth century. Venerated for his wisdom and insightful thinking, Carlyle fell out of favor after his death and has only recently been revived as a subject of scholarly interest.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Strict Calvinist Upbringing in Scotland Carlyle was born on December 4, 1795, in the Scottish village of Ecclefechan to James and Margaret Aitken Carlyle. His father, who was a stonemason and later a farmer, instilled Scottish Calvinist principles of self-denial and hard work into his large family. Carlyle attended Annan Academy from 1806 to 1809 and Edinburgh University from 1809 to 1814, but left the university without taking a degree.



Thomas Carlyle Carlyle, Thomas, photograph. The Library of Congress

His parents hoped that he would become a clergyman, but he was already dreaming of literary fame and started his literary career by translating and by writing reviews and encyclopedia articles. In 1823 the *London Magazine* asked Carlyle to write a short biographical sketch of German poet and dramatist Friedrich Schiller; the essay expanded during the writing to book length and became Carlyle's first literary biography.

In 1824 Carlyle visited London for the first time. He stayed with his friend Edward Irving, who introduced him to London literary society; among those Carlyle met was Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In 1821 he had met Jane Baillie Welsh, an ambitious and witty daughter of a doctor. They married on October 17, 1826, much to her family's dismay. In 1828 Carlyle and his wife moved to Craigenputtoch, an isolated farm.

Carlyle's 1833 Sartor Resartus, though fiction, tells much about Carlyle's ideas about the art of writing biography. The work sounds his message about the importance and pleasure of biography and the use of biography to find heroes: "Biography by nature is the most universally profitable, universally pleasant of all things: especially the Biography of distinguished individuals."

Friendship with Emerson In August 1833 Ralph Waldo Emerson visited Carlyle at Craigenputtoch. Their

friendship, conducted mostly by mail over the years, was beneficial for Carlyle: Emerson convinced a Boston publisher to publish *Sartor Resartus* in book form in 1836 (it did not appear in that form in England until 1838), funded the 1838 American edition of Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (published in England in 1837), and introduced Henry David Thoreau to Carlyle's works and, in turn, Carlyle to Walt Whitman's.

In June 1834 the Carlyles moved to 5 Cheyne Row, London. For the next three years Carlyle worked on *The French Revolution*. During this time he met William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, and the man who was to become his most cherished friend for the next nine years and the subject of one of his best biographies: the poet, novelist, and dramatist John Sterling.

From 1837 to 1841 Carlyle gave annual lectures on German literature, literature in general, revolution, and heroes. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History*, the published version of the May 1840 lectures, delineates the unconscious and mysterious forces that underlie the personalities of great men.

Literary Circles and Biography Subjects During the late 1830s and early 1840s Carlyle formed friendships with members of a new generation of writers, including Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, Charles Dickens, Richard Monckton Milnes, John Forster, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Edward FitzGerald. He planned a biography of Oliver Cromwell, the seventeenth-century Puritan leader who ruled England as a commonwealth after the English Civil War, during its period without a recognized king. However, the work stagnated and he decided instead to edit Cromwell's letters and speeches and let Cromwell speak for himself. The edition was published in 1845–1846.

In 1851 Carlyle began studying the life of Frederick the Great; in 1852 he traveled to Germany to continue his research. The first two volumes of the *History of Friedrich II of Prussia, called Frederick the Great*, were not published until 1858; Carlyle in the meantime had struggled with problems with sources, his own lack of enthusiasm about the project, and sorrow over his mother's death. In 1858 Carlyle traveled to Germany again, visiting battlefields to gather material for the remaining four volumes. It took seven more years, however, for Carlyle to finish the work.

In 1865 Carlyle was elected rector by the students of the University of Edinburgh, and on April 2, 1866, he delivered an inaugural address. While he was polishing the speech for publication, he received word that his wife had died. In 1868 Carlyle, with the help of his niece, Mary Aitken, organized Jane's letters, which he considered evidence of her brilliance; he also wrote annotations for a biography of her.

By 1871 Carlyle wrote only by dictation to Aitken. In the winter of 1871–72 he dictated a history of the early

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carlyle's famous contemporaries include:

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): Queen of England, and the person for whom the Victorian age was named.

Charles Dickens (1812–1870): British novelist of classics such as *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882): American writer and philosopher who led the transcendentalist movement.

Charles Darwin (1809–1882): naturalist and scientist credited with popularizing the concept of natural selection in his book *On the Origin of Species*.

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–1865): British novelist and biographer of Charlotte Brontë.

kings of Norway, in which he found new heroes in Olaf Tryggveson, King Olaf the Saint, and Magnus the Good.

Carlyle died in his sleep on February 5, 1881. He was buried in Ecclefechan. Carlyle was one of the most influential figures of the Victorian age; his attitudes affected a wide audience, particularly the writers of his day. His convictions that modern life was too "mechanical" and analytical, that greed and selfishness had replaced feelings of blessedness and brotherhood, and that spiritual rebirth was needed to bring coherence to modern life drew many to regard him with awe and reverence.

Works in Literary Context

Carlyle's contributions to literary biography are both theoretical and practical. "Man is," he says in "Biography," "properly the only object that interests man." The boundaries separating history, biography, literature, and social criticism are not rigid for Carlyle: In a sense all his works are a nineteenth-century epic poem. To him, history is a procession of great men rather than the interplay of economic, political, and social forces, and a good biography portrays both the character of the subject and the times in which he lived.

Radical and Experimental Format Sartor Resartus is in some ways a baffling work: Genuinely original in form and content, it combines biography, autobiography, essay, and political commentary with a layered structure and avoidance of final meaning which makes it seem well in advance of its time. It purportedly tells the story of a German academic (*Teufelsdröckh* or German for "Devil's Excrement") who travels a path from struggling beginning and self-doubt to awakening sensitivity to a supernaturally alive universe.

Heroes and Biographies After Sartor Resartus, Carlyle moved to London and began work on The French Revolution. While modern historians dispute the objectivity of Carlyle's view on the French Revolution, his carefully researched and vividly imagined work is a powerful evocation of what happens to a morally corrupt monarch and the accompanying abuse of social privilege and human exploitation. This method of scrupulous research and personal engagement with the subject helped establish Carlyle as a historian whose power was not just to recreate the past but also to use his historical works to disturb the present.

By the early 1840s Carlyle's works were selling well, and each new book conveyed an original mind at the peak of its powers. Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches—two volumes (1845) and a supplement (1846)—is a case in point. The English Civil War fascinated Carlyle for decades, and the personality of its great hero (and he certainly saw the Protector in this light, as the strong leader who saved the country from collapsing into anarchy) gave him the focus for a historical work which blends narrative with letters and documents of the period and intersperses all with the author's addresses to the figures he treats, especially Cromwell.

In the early 1850s Carlyle began working in earnest on his monumental history of Frederick the Great of Prussia. He, like Cromwell, was a ruler who earned Carlyle's approval for a job well done. Like Cromwell, too, he violated most of the civilized rules of freedom and justice to keep the machine of society running. The end, for Carlyle as for Frederick, clearly justified the means.

Works in Critical Context

Thomas Carlyle was an extremely long-lived Victorian author. He was also highly controversial, variously regarded as sage and impious, a moral leader, a moral desperado, a radical, a conservative, and a Christian. In the later twentieth century he was still far from being understood by a generation of critics awakening to his pivotal place in nineteenth-century Britain. He is coming to be seen as innovator and survivor, a man born in the eighteenth century who lived through most of the nineteenth, whose early work predated Victoria's reign, and whose longevity almost matched his monarch's. Alive, he was an enigma; dead, he remains a problematic figure for the literary historian as well as for the critic.

Sartor Resartus Carlyle's first major piece was a radical, nontraditional blend of fiction, biography, and political commentary rendered in both a serious and farcical tone. Perhaps due to its highly original content, Sartor Resartus is not easily understood. (Carlyle included comments from puzzled readers in later editions of the book.) His wife, Jane Carlyle, a perceptive voice among early readers, pronounced it "a work of genius," however, and others took it as such (notably, the American poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson). Although it no longer

provokes the shock and confusion it did upon publication, *Sartor Resartus* remains a difficult book and has lacked the critical attention it perhaps deserves.

The French Revolution The appearance of the three volumes of The French Revolution in 1837 better acquainted readers with Carlyle's passionate style and his passionate belief in the need for society's rebirth, so that the seriousness of Sartor Resartus was more readily received, and now it is taken for a masterpiece, and rightly. While historians today have discredited much of the emphasis and interpretation Carlyle gave history in the volumes on France (and in the later works on Oliver Cromwell and Frederick the Great), few deny the power of Carlyle's view of the revolution. The historical research and annotation bespeak careful preparation, and the artistic impulse behind the finished work orders and selects, to orchestrate a pattern clearly of the author's choosing and to highlight his message of the inevitability of revolution in a France rotten with abused social privilege, skeptical freethinking, and human exploitation.

Legacy Several works published after Carlyle's death had a profound effect on his reputation. His confidant and executor was James Anthony Froude, a young historian and longtime admirer of Carlyle to whom his literary remains and papers were entrusted. Froude took his position seriously and was hard at work on biographical materials long before Carlyle's death. Hence the Reminiscences appeared soon after Carlyle's death, followed by four magnificent but badly flawed volumes of biography by Froude (1882, 1884) and Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle (1883), which had been partly annotated by Carlyle in the 1860s and 1870s. The effect of Froude's work in the years following Carlyle's death was extraordinary. Almost overnight, it seemed, Carlyle plunged from his position as Sage of Chelsea and Grand Old Victorian to the object of puzzled dislike, or even of revulsion, due to the image of the writer that emerged in personal writings selected by Froude.

Carlyle remained a neglected writer until the mid-1950s; since then, critical awareness of his work and its importance has risen steadily. With the publication of scholarly editions of his works, and above all of his letters, the reader stands a better chance than ever before of making an accurate and fair estimation of his importance.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Choose one incident from Carlyle's *The French Revolution* and research other accounts of the historical event. Look for places where Carlyle's account differs from other sources. How do you think Carlyle shaped his work to comment on the events of his time? Why do you think he did so?
- 2. Carlyle belongs in the literary period called "the Victorian age." Research Queen Victoria, and sug-

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Carlyle was one of the first historians to vividly narrate historical material in an effort to comment on his own times. Here are a number of biographies and histories that also break new ground.

The Life of Johnson (1791), a biography by James Boswell. Boswell's biography of his close friend and English poet, Samuel Johnson, was revolutionary in his use of quoted material and vivid details to paint the picture of a living, breathing human rather than a dry historical figure.

The Armies of the Night (1968), a book by Norman Mailer. This Pulitzer Prize—winning book, about the 1967 march on the Pentagon to protest the Vietnam war, helped create a new type of nonfiction novel.

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (2003), a graphic memoir by Marjane Satrapi. Satrapi's memoir of growing up in Iran won many critics and readers over to graphic literature.

- gest three ways her political reign influenced the literature of the time.
- 3. Carlyle was much influenced by concept of heroes, both historical and literary. Research how our concept of heroes has changed over time. Consider some of the heroes Carlyle writes about in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History*. Compare these to modern examples of heroes. How are they similar? How are they different?
- 4. Carlyle believed it was important to imagine the historical details as vividly as possible and would visit battlefields and historic sites in order to get the details right. Is this an important, integral part of good historical scholarship or does it sacrifice objectivity by creating a personal connection between author and subject?

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Alejo Carpentier

BORN: 1904, Lausanne, Switzerland

DIED: 1980, Paris, France NATIONALITY: Cuban GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Music in Cuba (1946)

The Kingdom of This World (1949)

The Lost Steps (1953)

Explosion in a Cathedral (1962)

Overview

Alejo Carpentier is a commanding figure in Latin American literature and intellectual life: a novelist, literary theorist, musician and musicologist, journalist, publicist, and radio producer. After a brief association with the surrealist movement in Paris, he developed his own concept of "lo real maravilloso" (the marvelous real), a forerunner to the magical realist genre popular in Latin American fiction. Carpentier lived outside his homeland for many years, and his expatriate experience supplied the stimulus for his novels, which portray the encounter of European culture with the mysterious primitivism of the untouched New World.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Two Childhoods and the Struggle for Reconciliation Alejo Carpentier y Valmont inherited from his family background a Latin American cosmopolitanism. Born in Lausanne, Switzerland, on December 26, 1904,



Alejo Carpentier Joseph Fabry / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

he was taken to Havana as an infant, and later claimed he was born in Cuba. His father was a French architect; his mother was of Russian descent and had studied medicine in Switzerland. His parents were new arrivals in the Spanish-American republic but not poor immigrants. Carpentier would later recall roaming in his father's spacious library. Throughout his life, he struggled to reconcile the two worlds of his childhood: the sheltered European one of his home and the livelier world of Cuban blacks in the street.

The Afro-Cuban Avant-Garde Carpentier's first language was French, and he spoke Spanish with a French accent. He attended private schools, and received advanced musical training at a prestigious Parisian lycee as a teenager. He began studies in architecture at the University of Havana in 1920. His education ended abruptly, however, when his father deserted the family in 1922. Forced to leave the university, he supported himself as a journalist. He wrote music and theater reviews for Havana newspapers and at the age of nineteen became editor of the avant-garde weekly Carteles. Later, he helped to found another influential periodical, Revista de Avance.

By 1927 Carpentier had begun to distinguish himself as a promoter of the nascent Afro-Cuban movement, which introduced African elements into the arts. He wrote librettos and collaborated in the creation of ballets, comic operas, and experimental theater pieces. Carpentier and his companions viewed black culture as a source of creative and political energy, a rejection of European values. For them, Afro-Cuban art spread the spirit of rebellion and helped uplift the faith of black people in their own culture.

The political situation in Cuba was becoming more chaotic. Rebellion was growing against the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado y Morales, who had come to power in 1925. During a roundup of dissidents in 1927, Carpentier was arrested and held for forty days. While in prison, he began writing *Ecue-yamba-o!*, an Afro-Cuban novel that would later become his first published book. Upon his release, he knew he was blacklisted and under suspicion. A French poet, Robert Desnos, allowed the Cuban to use his papers to escape to France.

The Paris Years Carpentier spent eleven years in Paris. Through his connection with Desnos, he became associated with the surrealists. He also met many Spanish and Latin American writers in Paris and Madrid. Carpentier continued to write for Carteles and other Cuban publications; his reviews kept the Cuban public informed about the artistic revolution developing in Europe. He even published a column on women's fashion under the pseudonym Jacqueline.

Carpentier began to work in radio broadcasting as a writer, publicist, and sound-effects specialist. Radio and advertising would be his occupation for the next three decades. He wrote experimental radio plays and collaborated on musical programs with avant-garde composers. While he was in Paris, he published his first novel, *Ecueyamba-o!* (1933). The book fared poorly with critics, and he did not attempt to publish fiction again for more than a decade.

Carpentier immersed himself in studying the history and culture of the Americas. He was fascinated with African religious and social practices, and the way these were transplanted to the Europeanized Cuban culture. Years later, Carpentier would attempt to reconcile the Spanish America that he discovered in books in Paris with another experienced firsthand; the gap between them would furnish the material for his greatest fiction.

The Lost Steps By 1939, the situation in Europe was growing tense, and Carpentier returned to Cuba. In 1945, he left Havana for Caracas, Venezuela, to work in advertising and radio. In Venezuela, he entered his most productive period. His first important publication, which he had started to research before leaving Cuba, was Music in Cuba (1946), a work of scholarship. In his attempt to trace the origins of Cuban music and the essence of Cuban culture, Carpentier reaches back to the first ballads sung by Spanish mariners of the sixteenth century and to the ritual music of Native Americans as well as Africans.

Some of the important features of Cuban music were contributed by the first Haitian exiles. Researching this

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carpentier's famous contemporaries include:

Fidel Castro (1926–): Cuban revolutionary leader and head of state from 1959 to 2008.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Argentine writer whose works were banned in Cuba under Castro.

Jose Lezama Lima (1910–1976): Cuban poet and an influential figure in Latin American literature who wrote in a baroque style.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973): Nobel Prize–winning Chilean poet and communist diplomat.

Octavio Paz (1914–1998): Mexican writer, poet, and diplomat who also won the Nobel Prize.

Leopold Sedar Senghor (1906–2001): Senegalese poet, developer of the theory of negritude, and president of Senegal from 1960 to 1980.

early stage in Cuban history brought his attention to Haiti and its revolution. A trip there in 1943 brought him face to face with the "marvelous real" in the land-scape, myths, and history of the Americas and inspired him to write his historical novel, *The Kingdom of This World* (1949). This story of Haiti, told largely from a slave's point of view, sets the values of the European Enlightenment up against the intensity of Caribbean culture, with its supernatural and magical aspects.

Origin of a Reflective Stance During vacations from his busy life in the metropolis of Caracas, Carpentier took trips to the jungles along the Orinoco River. Experiencing both a Latin America of the future and one of the remote past furnished him with the reflective stance found in The Lost Steps (1953), considered by many to be his greatest novel. The novel's narrator, a musician, travels into the Amazonian rainforest in search of indigenous musical instruments and explores the possibility of evading time and casting off civilization. This allegorical story casts doubt on whether modern man, with his diminished urban existence, can recover his authentic nature in any guise.

History and Revolution In Caracas, Carpentier succeeded in becoming one of the best-known Latin American writers, but it was not easy. He was forced to help finance the publication of his books. A second edition of The Lost Steps in 1959 was widely circulated in the Spanish-speaking world. That year, Cuba underwent a communist revolution, and Fidel Castro became the nation's political leader. Carrying the manuscript for his next novel in his luggage, Carpentier returned to his home country. He accepted the position of director of the staterun Cuban Publishing House in Havana.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Alejo Carpentier probed the tangled history of the New World in his novels, illuminating the connection between the past and present as few historical texts do. Here are some additional works in the relatively new genre of Latin American historical fiction:

The War of the End of the World (1981), a novel by Mario Vargas Llosa. A novel based on the true story of a religious fanatic and his followers, who provoke a civil war in Brazil in the 1890s.

The General in His Labyrinth (1989), a story by Gabriel García Márquez. A fictional account of the "Great Liberator" of South America, Simon Bolivar, in his final days.

All Souls' Rising (2004), a novel by Madison Smartt Bell. The first installment of an epic trilogy about the slave uprising in Haiti that turned a colonial outpost into the world's first black republic.

Inés of My Soul (2006), a novel by Isabel Allende. The story of the origins of Chile told through the life of Inés Suarez, a sixteenth-century conquistadora (female conquistador).

Malinche (2007), a novel by Laura Esquivel. A historical novel based on the love affair between conquistador Hernán Cortés and his Native American interpreter.

Carpentier completed the manuscript of Explosion in a Cathedral and published it in 1962. The book was a best seller and incited much political debate. It is a historical novel centering on the effects of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution on Latin America. It offers a model of Latin American fiction based on the history of the New World, expanding on the themes and problems posed in *The Kingdom of This World* and *The Lost Steps*.

After Explosion in a Cathedral there was a twelveyear hiatus in Carpentier's fiction writing. However, in 1964 he published a book of essays, Probes and Differences, that had an enormous impact on Latin American literature. The book republished his prologue to The Kingdom of This World, his fullest statement of the theory of the "marvelous real." Invoking the magical presence he found in Latin America's indigenous interior, Carpentier argued for a mode of narration that could incorporate miraculous elements without seeming artificial. His theory, appearing in the wake of the Cuban Revolution and the Latin American boom, created rifts among critics of the Spanish-American novel. Probes and Differences also contained Carpentier's ideas on the baroque style, an important quality in Latin American literature and in his own novels.

Later Career as a Controversial Figure Carpentier's connection with the revolutionary Cuban government transformed him into a controversial figure in Latin American cultural politics. While artists and intellectuals became disillusioned with the repressiveness of the Castro regime and its dependence on the Soviet Union, Carpentier remained faithful to the revolutionary government, turned his back on friends who did not, and refrained from criticism about government policies. The Cuban government rewarded Carpentier with a privileged position. He spent from 1968 until the end of his life in France as a cultural ambassador. He was allowed to receive royalties and publish outside the island, as other Cuban writers were not.

Carpentier's next work was his only satirical novel. Reasons of State (1974) concerns a dictator attempting to rule the fictitious Nueva Cordoba from his home in Paris, periodically returning to his country to control revolutionary outbreaks. A tragicomic figure of artificiality, he ends up with no control over anything. His final novel, The Harp and the Shadow (1979), is based on the life of Christopher Columbus. Readers find out that it was by seducing Queen Isabella that Columbus secured her help, thereby rendering the entire American enterprise part of an illicit love affair. Carpentier wrote the novel after being diagnosed with cancer; he died in Paris on April 24, 1980.

Works in Literary Context

Alejo Carpentier grew up in an affluent family and received a fine education. In his father's library, he satisfied his curiosities as a young reader with classic French authors such as Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert, as well as Pio Baroja, the modern Spanish novelist. While he spoke French at home, his association with Cubans of African, Indian, and Spanish origin influenced him as he sought to combine the European and American worlds of his childhood.

The "Marvelous Real" Carpentier's studies in Latin American history exerted a profound influence on his writing. So did his firsthand experiences in the ruins of Haiti and the jungles of the Orinoco, from which arose his concept of the "marvelous real." In his novels, the continent's ancient past is forcefully alive, and the natural environment is sentient and magical. Critic Roberto Gonzales-Echeverria, in his book Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home, writes: "Carpentier searches for the marvelous buried beneath the surface of Latin American consciousness, where African drums still beat and Indian amulets rule; in depths where Europe is only a vague memory of a future still to come." Incongruity and paradox, according to Carpentier, are at the heart of Latin American life and the "marvelous real."

Fueling the Boom Carpentier's literary theory—and works such as The Kingdom of This World, which put his ideas into practice—influenced the writers who created

the Latin American literary boom of the 1960s. Two notables clearly influenced by Carpentier are Gabriel García Márquez of Colombia and Carlos Fuentes of Mexico. It is reported that upon reading *Explosion in a Cathedral*, García Márquez abandoned a draft of his most famous novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and started over from scratch. More broadly, Carpentier is acknowledged among the originators of magical realism.

Works in Critical Context

Although considered a major literary force in Latin America, Alejo Carpentier did not achieve widespread recognition with the American reading public. Critics have asserted that the erudite quality of his prose—discoursing on such disparate subjects as anthropology, geography, zoology, history, philosophy, musicology, and cuisine—may repel many readers. On the other hand, his work has rated better among French readers and critics. Both *The Kingdom of This World* and *The Lost Steps* won literary prizes in France. Taken as a whole, his writing is considered without parallel in twentieth-century literature for having defined the special role of Latin America in global culture and its mythologies.

The Lost Steps When Carpentier's The Lost Steps was published in English in 1956, it commanded little attention from American readers, despite the success of the novel in other languages. The lack of American success was even more disappointing, since the main character of the novel is a Manhattan musician who journeys to the heart of the jungle in search of undiscovered musical instruments played by the indigenous people there. The reception from American critics was positive, though it did not translate into sales. An unnamed reviewer from Time calls it "one of the finest fictional forays toward an answer" of whether humans are happier in modern civilization or in a more primitive state of nature. The reviewer also notes that the author "is equipped with an elegance of perception and distinction of style," and that despite the lack of a clear-cut message, he proves to be "a more rewarding guide than many a more decisive pundit."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Carpentier spent many years studying music when he was young. How are these studies reflected in his published works?
- 2. In what ways does the character of Columbus in *The Harp and the Shadow* represent Carpentier himself?
- 3. Compare the "marvelous real" in Carpentier's fiction to magical realist authors such as Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende.
- 4. After the Cuban revolution, Carpentier became controversial for his acceptance of the Castro regime. What political issues and stances stand out in his novels?

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Roch Carrier

BORN: 1937, Sainte-Justine-de-Dorchester,

Québec

NATIONALITY: Canadian

GENRE: Fiction
MAIOR WORKS:

La Guerre, Yes Sir! (1968)

Floralie, Where Are You? (1969)

Is It the Sun, Philibert? (1971)

The Hockey Sweater, and Other Stories (1979)

Heartbreaks Along the Road (1984)

Overview

With almost fifty books to his credit, Roch Carrier is one of the most prolific and original of contemporary Québec writers. He is best known for his writing of *le conte*—the very short story—but he insists that his interest in form is secondary to the more pressing need he feels to invent stories that reveal Québec to itself. A lifelong resident of Montreal, Carrier thinks of himself as a popular writer and maintains that his style and way of seeing things do not come from literature but from life in general and from the life of his native village in particular.



Roch Carrier Carrier, Roch, 1991, photograph by Randy Velocci. The Globe and Mail, Toronto. Reproduced by permission of the photographer.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

French Canadian Roots Roch Carrier was born to Georges and Marie-Anna Tanguay Carrier on May 13, 1937. His birthplace, the village of Sainte-Justine-de-Dorchester, southeast of Québec City near the Maine border, would become the setting for much of his fiction. Canada has a history with roots in both British and French culture. Explorers from both countries established territories there during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though France ultimately gave up claims to its territories during the eighteenth century. Despite officially becoming a dominion of the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century, parts of Canada retained their French roots and culture, particularly in the province of Québec where Carrier lived. This remains the only part of Canada where French is the sole official language. Cultural differences between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians have inspired much of Carrier's work.

Carrier came from a family of stonecutters and church builders, and his father, from whom he says he gets his gift of humor, was a salesman. After several years of local schooling (described in *The Hockey Sweater, and Other Stories*, 1979), and later having married Diane Gosselin in 1959, Carrier studied at Collège Saint-Louis in New Brunswick, then at l'Université de Montréal. There he received a bachelor of arts in French literature and wrote a master of arts thesis on Guillaume Apollinaire in 1961.

The Writing Evolution It was at the university that he began to write and have his first poems and short stories published. His stories grew from his poems, which tended to become more and more anecdotal; and his short, dense, episodically structured novels appeared to be built from interconnected stories. Carrier's first fulllength book, Jolis deuils: Petites tragedies pour adultes (1964), won the Prix Litteraire de la Province de Québec in 1964. A year later the work was awarded the province of Québec award, Les Concours littéraires du Québec. During the late 1960s and the 1970s, he devoted most of his time to the novel, but he continued to write short fiction, including "Contes for a Million Ears," published in Ecrits du Canada Français in 1969. It was not until fifteen years after *Jolis deuils*, however, that he produced another full story collection.

The Trilogy From 1961 to 1964, Carrier studied at the University of Paris as he prepared a doctoral thesis on the French poet Blaise Cendrars. On his return to Québec he taught at Collège Militaire Royal de Saint-Jean and at l'Université de Montréal. He began work on his first three novels—La Guerre, Yes Sir! (1968), Floralie, Where Are You? (1969), and Is It the Sun, Philibert? (1971)—intending to chronicle three of the "dark ages of Québec." The trilogy established Carrier's reputation in Québec and abroad with its presentation of a search for meaning in life and death, a search, according to Canadian Encyclopedia Historica, that permeates Carrier's work.

Commencing with La Guerre, Yes Sir! (1968), his first and best-known novel, he began publishing his work at the rate of almost a book a year. La Guerre, Yes Sir! was published in English in 1970.

The Theater Years In 1970 Carrier left teaching to become secretary-general of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. La Guerre, Yes Sir! was adapted for the stage that year and after a successful European tour was performed in an English translation at the Stratford Festival in 1972. The work has since been made into a film as well. Another film afforded by the 1972 National Film Board verifies Carrier's claim to make story form second to his subject, Québec. In the movie The Ungrateful Land, for which he wrote the scenario, Carrier returns to Sainte-Justine-de-Dorchester and explains the village for the camera. Images of an enormous team of Percherons, or draft horses, failing to move a huge boulder in a weight-pulling contest express strength and frustration. Scenes of a proud local industry manufacturing thousands of baseball bats portray progress and humiliation as the camera pulls back, revealing them to be three-inch

miniatures. Many other comic but touching cameos tie in perfectly with what would later be known as classic Carrier paradoxical vision.

Carrier adapted his next novel, *Floralie*, *Where Are Yow*? (1969) for Théâtre du Nouveau Monde in 1974. Soon after, this loose trilogy consisting of Carrier's first three novels began selling better in English than in the original French. In 1975 Carrier left his job as theater administrator to return to teaching at Collège Militaire Royal and to continue writing. In 1980 he was awarded the prestigious Grand Prix Littéraire de la Ville de Montréal.

The Arts and Library Advocacy In 1999, Carrier was named National Librarian of Canada. As Canadian Encyclopedia Historica reports, Carrier was instrumental in addressing and even solving several problems experienced by Canada's contemporary libraries. To remedy the problem of inadequate housing for the miles of print material and the issue of costs associated with accessing digital media, Carrier initiated the launch of the Digital Library of Canada, "an online database that contains digitized copies of some of the most significant national treasures." He was also instrumental in the removal of the barrier fees first required for using AMICUS, Canada's national bibliographic database. Carrier's combined efforts were successful in increasing access to all Canadians. Carrier's hometown of Saint-Justine-de-Dorchester, which did not have its own library during his youth, now features a library named in honor of the author.

Works in Literary Context

Roch Carrier is an instinctive writer. He claims to write not so much to display as to discover what he knows. He continually experiments, not following any school but in an individualistic way, from book to book, capitalizing on new techniques without ever betraying the distinctive voice and vision that have marked all his work.

Le Conte In some respects, Carrier's imagination seems most fertile in the short-story form or, more precisely, in its brief Québecois version known as le conte. These fastmoving sketches begin in reality and quickly escalate into fantasy. The language is metaphorical, the development poetic. In a few hundred words a grotesque situation is exploited, a miniature moral is drawn, and an ironic commentary on human foibles is neatly and forcefully made. In "L'Encre," for example, from Jolis deuils, a general is signing a peace treaty. His pen catches and splutters. The ink spreads. It covers the paper, the table, the floor, the city, the country. It invades the neighboring nation. War is declared. The ink extends its empire. Fighting becomes futile and a cease-fire is ordered. A new treaty is drawn up. One of the generals initialing the clauses is nervous. His pen catches and splutters, and so on.

Exploring Dichotomies While many of his most loved works—such as his children's books—are rife with humor and light, Carrier's adult books celebrate oppo-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carrier's famous contemporaries include:

Frank Gehry (1929–): Canadian-born architect famous for his inventive and visually whimsical buildings.

Leonard Cohen (1934–): Montreal native famous as a songwriter, poet, and novelist; inducted into the American Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2008.

Jacques Chirac (1932–): President of France from 1995 until 2007.

Joe Orton (1933–1967): English satirical playwright, he wrote risqué black comedies that shocked and amused his audiences.

Philippe Panneton (1895–1960): Working under the pen name Ringuet, this Canadian academic, physician, and writer cofounded L'Académie canadienne-française and was given title of ambassador to Portugal, among other titles.

sites of both light and dark: violence and laughter; gusto and defeat; man's potential grandeur and his faltering performance; life, or as Carrier would prefer to put it, love and death. In his first three novels, for example, the author set out to chronicle what he calls "three of the dark ages of Québec." Floralie, Where Are You? (1969) is set in the latter part of the nineteenth century at the time of the coming of the railroad to rural Québec. Here the dark is in the ignorance, superstition, guilt, and fear of a backward, isolated, church-dominated people. La Guerre, Yes Sir! (1968) takes place during the second conscription crisis late in World War II. In this novel, the same forces operate, augmented by those of political oppression and racial prejudice and strife. Is It the Sun, Philibert? (1971) is set in Montreal during the heyday of Maurice "Rocket" Richard—Quebec's most famous hockey player—in the early 1950s. In this work, the darkness extends to social injustice, industrial abuse, and modern urban stress.

Though the three novels share some settings and characters, their underlying thematic unity and intensity of tone are their strongest bond. In this loose trilogy, Carrier staked out his fictional territory and established the creative attitudes and the narrative voice that characterize the rest of his work.

Works in Critical Context

Carrier has earned a critical reception as diverse as his audiences. At one critical extreme are novels such as *Heartbreaks Along the Road* (1984), his most ambitious work to date, and, at the other end of the spectrum, those works that display Carrier's humor and compassion at

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who, like Carrier, have also written *contes*, fairy tales, or folk tales, often set in their homelands:

"The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1867), a short story by Mark Twain. Twain uses his considerable storytelling abilities and many folktale conventions in this humorous and widely anthologized story. Tales of My Mother Goose (1867), a children's book by Charles Perrault. This classic collection features the archetypal Mother Goose and several well-known characters including Puss in Boots.

Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings. The Folklore of the Old Plantation (1880), by Joel Chandler Harris. Harris repackaged African American folktales in the collection, which enjoyed wide readership among whites in both the North and South in the generations following the American Civil War. His work is controversial, as many African American writers of the twentieth century accuse Harris of appropriating black culture.

The Wide Net and Other Stories (1943), a short-story collection by Eudora Welty. Welty mixed various mythologies with folk conventions in these masterful stories set in the American South.

their inventive best, such as the classic "The Hockey Sweater."

Heartbreaks Along the Road In Heartbreaks Along the Road, written in the style of rough rural realism, Carrier paints a satiric fresco of village life in the 1950s under the regime of "le Chef," Québec premier Maurice Duplessis. The village is Saint-Toussaint-des-Saints. The loose plot revolves around the building of a new road as the result of a campaign promise, although the road leads nowhere and is dismantled as soon as it is finished to make more jobs for the unemployed. Dozens of characters appear in single episodes or anecdotes and then melt into the background again. Such a broad comic panorama is unusual in Québec fiction, and Heartbreaks Along the Road has been heralded as the Québecois equivalent to Gabriel García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude.

The Hockey Sweater, and Other Stories "The Hockey Sweater" owes something to the previous novel and recalls Carrier's first published fiction. In this story for young readers, "a disastrous boyhood episode is fondly recreated," says Horn Book reviewer Ethel L. Heins in Contemporary Authors Online. A young boy outgrows his fan jersey, which is emblazoned with the logo and colors of the Montreal Canadiens—"the best hockey team in the world." His mother "writes to Mr.

Eaton" (orders from the Eaton's catalog) for a new one. The eager fan is mortified when the package arrives and his mother hands him a Toronto Maple Leafs jersey instead, the very emblem of the much-hated rivals.

If adaptations and borrowings are any indication of positive reception, "The Hockey Sweater" has one of the highest reputations: The story was funded by the National Film Board of Canada and made into an animated short film, with Carrier as narrator of both the French and English versions. As one of Carrier's most famous contes, it has been excerpted for the backside of the Canadian five-dollar bill. Considered by many to be an allegory, an exemplary story of the tensions existing between French and English Canada, *The Hockey Sweater* is also "a funny story," according to *School Library Journal* contributor Joan McGrath. "But it is the fun of an adult looking indulgently back to remember a horrible childhood humiliation from the tranquil plateau of adulthood."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Carrier writes on subjects that are as important locally as they often are globally. Investigate the history of hockey in Canada, starting in the 1940s when Carrier was a boy. Consider the influence of the Montreal Canadiens versus the Toronto Maple Leafs: What was the impact of their rivalry on hockey fans? What did their competition represent to Canadians?
- 2. Try your hand at a conte. Write a story, making it as short as you can. Try to have a situation, a rising action, a climax, and a resolution. Exchange contes with fellow students in an open-microphone reading session.
- 3. Much of Carrier's writing is autobiographical. His stories of childhood moments and events are appealing and often funny because of this: Whether they are narrated in English or French, there is something most people can identify with that makes them laugh. Think of an event or incident in your childhood that you feel is relevant to most people, and write an autobiographical sketch (or memoir). Describe the event. Describe the characters involved. Narrate what someone did to cause an embarrassing moment. Add dialogue or other details to make it funny.

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Lewis Carroll

BORN: 1832, Daresbury, Cheshire, England DIED: 1898, Guildford, Surrey, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There (1872) The Hunting of the Snark (1876)

Sylvie and Bruno (1889)

Overview

Few writers of fantasy have managed to permeate their own cultures as did Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, a mathematician and amateur photographer who wrote children's books under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll. Like other memorable characters who have taken on lives beyond their fictional sources, such Carroll creations as the Mad Hatter, the Red Queen, and the Cheshire Cat are known even to those who have never read his work. Among those with an enduring love of Carroll's work was Walt Disney, whose 1951 animated adaptation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has been perhaps even more successful at sharing Carroll's unique ideas with modern audiences than the author's own books.



Lewis Carroll Charles L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), photograph. The Library of Congress.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

An Excellent but Unhappy Student The man known best as Lewis Carroll was born Charles Lutwidge Dodgson on January 27, 1832, in Daresbury, Cheshire, the oldest son of the Reverend Charles Dodgson and Frances Jane Lutwidge Dodgson. He was the third of eleven children, and his ability to entertain children likely began with his younger siblings, for whom he invented games. In his early childhood Dodgson was educated at home. His father became rector at another parish in 1843, prompting the family's move to Croft in Yorkshire. The following year Dodgson began attending Richmond Grammar School, and in 1846 he started studies at Rugby. He was a good student but was unhappy in the public school environment. In 1850, the year of his mother's death, he entered Christ Church, Oxford University, where he earned first-class honors in mathematics and second-class honors in classics before graduating in 1854. In the middle of his college studies he had been granted a Studentship, a research internship; it would provide a lifelong living, but to keep it Dodgson was required to take holy orders and remain celibate—neither of which he apparently found difficult.

Entrance into Academia and Religious Life In 1855 Dodgson was appointed a fellow at Christ Church and began lecturing on mathematics, the start of a long and fairly uneventful academic life. He completed his master's degree in 1857, and in 1861 he was ordained a deacon of the Church of England, making him officially the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. His stammer may have determined his decision not to follow his father into the next step; there were likely other personal reasons as well, such as his love of the theater. Still, occasionally Dodgson was called upon to officiate at religious ceremonies such as baptisms and funerals.

A Lifelong Bachelor A lifelong bachelor, Dodgson devoted his time not spent in academic pursuits to reading, writing, and taking photographs, a hobby he took up starting in 1856. He admired many contemporary writers of the day, including Alfred, Lord Tennyson and William Makepeace Thackeray, and he often persuaded writers to be photographed. Dodgson also befriended young girls in the Oxford community, frequently making them the subjects of his photographs. He was at ease with children, joking with them and entertaining them with stories, songs, puzzles, and games. The same could not be said for Dodgson as a lecturer: His students routinely found him clear and knowledgeable, but dry if not boring. Certainly the titles of his early mathematical publications give no indication of Dodgson's wit.

It is perhaps not surprising that Dodgson went on to create the Alice books during an era of invention and expansion. As the British Empire continued expanding under the rule of Queen Victoria, scientific inventions like the lightbulb, telephone, and automobile were making their way into the commercial markets.

The Alice Books The origins of Carroll's Alice books are well known. Dodgson was particularly interested in a girl named Alice Liddell, who was nine years old when he began telling her and her sisters a fantastic story during a boat trip and picnic with Robinson Duckworth, a canon, on July 4, 1862. The children begged him to write down the extemporaneous story, and this served as the basis for his two books about the fictional Alice. Dodgson completed the manuscript of his first novel, which he had titled Alice's Adventures Under Ground in 1864; at the urging of his friend George MacDonald's children, it was published the following year as Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Though many others have illustrated the Alice books, the best-known illustrations are those by John Tenniel, which appeared in their original publications.

Meeting Queen Victoria Dodgson was a quiet, religious man, always somewhat embarrassed by his fame as Lewis Carroll (even to the point of returning any mail addressed to him under that name), but he had a rich sense of humor, as shown not only in his writings but also in a story related to Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

After its publication he was invited to meet Queen Victoria, who exclaimed over the book and asked Dodgson to send her his next effort. This he dutifully did, and the queen received an inscribed copy of a book on mathematical determinants. Needless to say, she was not amused.

In 1869 Dodgson published another book as Lewis Carroll, *Phantasmagoria and Other Poems*. It was not as successful, though, as either *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* or his next Lewis Carroll book, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, which, like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was both incredibly popular and critically acclaimed. Another Carroll work, *The Hunting of the Snark: An Agony in Eight Fits*, was published in 1876. Like the Alice books, it relies heavily on interesting characters and situations and on the use of nonsense. In this long comic poem, ten figures in search of adventure hunt for a beast called a Snark. The seeming silliness of it all is part of the appeal, as is Carroll's wit.

Lectureship Resignation Leaves More Time to Write In the 1880s Dodgson became increasingly more private. In 1880 he abandoned photography, and the following year, at age forty-nine, he resigned his lectureship in mathematics to devote himself to his studies and his writing. Although he supported his six unmarried sisters and helped to pay for relatives' education, he did not need much money himself (in fact, in 1880 he had requested that his salary be lowered since he was not teaching that much), and he apparently did not enjoy lecturing. However, he then accepted an appointment as curator of the Senior Common Room at Christ Church in 1882, a position he resigned ten years later.

Dodgson's other extended effort as Lewis Carroll appeared as two related books, *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893). Readers and critics generally find these works less appealing than the Alice books and *The Hunting of the Snark*, probably because they are more deliberately moralistic than Carroll's earlier fantasies. While the early books had avoided the Victorian tendency to use children's literature primarily to teach values, the Sylvie and Bruno books are hurt by this tendency. In these books he uses fantasy—here the elements of fairy romance—not for their own sake but for allegorical purposes.

Death and Publication of an Illustrated Manuscript Dodgson died on January 14, 1898, of a bronchial infection while visiting some of his sisters in Guildford, Surrey. That same year Alice Liddell Hargreaves, once the girl who inspired the Alice books and to whom Dodgson had given his illustrated manuscript "Alice's Adventures Under Ground" in 1864, had the manuscript auctioned for 15,400 pounds. At the time it was the highest price ever paid for a book in an auction in Britain.

Works in Literary Context

A clergyman, mathematician, and logician, Carroll is one of the foremost writers of fantasy in literary history. Carroll was encouraged to publish by his mentor George MacDonald, a Scottish author who also wrote fairy tales and fantasy novels. Prior to publishing, Carroll's social circle included a number of influential artists including John Ruskin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Arthur Hughes. Lauded as a genius who fused his eccentric personal characteristics and opinions with a genuine love of children and childhood, he helped liberate juvenile literature from its history of didacticism and overt moralizing. The Alice books have a value beyond their appeal to children. They have also been interpreted as political satire and are highly esteemed as sophisticated treatises on mathematics and logic.

The Fantastic Several qualities of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass have contributed to their longevity. First is the books's success as fantasy: Through Carroll's prodigious imagination his fantastic worlds come to life, vibrantly filled as they are with bizarre places, people, and happenings, all seen through the experience of a girl who is sensible enough to find these things silly or scary but who is young enough to take pretty much everything in stride.

Linguistic Playfulness Supporting the fantasy is Carroll's playfulness with language. Second only to Edward Lear in the creation of nonsense words and verse, in his Alice books and elsewhere Carroll manages to incorporate many delightfully nonsensical words into his stories. This succeeds in large part because, as Humpty Dumpty points out to Alice in his explication of the poem "Jabberwocky," the words do make sense in a sort of distorted logic. Carroll's frequently twisted games with logic in the books are yet another reason why readers, young and old, have enjoyed Carroll's tales about Alice for more than a century.

Alice Lives On Since their publication, elements from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There have made their way into popular culture and influenced works in a variety of artistic media. While so-called "Alice imitations" were most popular at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, works like Maeve Kelly's Alice in Thunderland (1993) and Alison Haben's Dreamhouse (1995) continue to be published.

Works in Critical Context

The Alice Books Lewis Carroll's masterpieces, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass, have not only endured in their own right, but have also been adapted many times on stage and screen; they have been alluded to in countless literary works, movies, television shows, and songs; and they have

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carroll's famous contemporaries include:

Sully Prudhomme (1839–1907): Winner of the first Nobel Prize in Literature in 1901, this French poet and essayist is best-known for his idealism and ability to synthesize themes from both the sciences and the arts. **Edward Lear** (1812–1888): British prosence writer who

Edward Lear (1812–1888): British nonsense writer who made the limerick popular.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939): A key figure in the Irish Literary Revival and cofounder of the Abbey Theatre, this Irish dramatist and author remains one of the most significant literary figures of the twentieth century.

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): Queen of England for sixty-three years, a period known as the Victorian era, she was partly responsible for the success of the Industrial Revolution and is known for her role in the expansion of the British Empire.

George MacDonald (1824–1905): Scottish pastor and author of popular fairy tales, such as *The Princess and the Goblin*.

Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936): One of the most popular authors of his day, this English writer is highly regarded for his contributions to the short story and children's literature genres; for this Kipling was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1907.

inspired many other works of fantasy and science fiction, directly or indirectly. Critics have noted Carroll's playful exploration of the paradoxes of thought and language; poet W. H. Auden commented: "[In the Alice books], one of the most important and powerful characters is not a person but the English language. Alice, who had hitherto supposed that words were passive objects, discovers that they have a life and will of their own. When she tries to remember poems she has learned, new lines come into her head unbidden and, when she thinks she knows what a word means, it turns out to mean something else."

Early reviews of the Alice books concentrated on Carroll's magnificent invention and his skill as a linguist, parodist, and literary stylist. After his death, critics analyzed the stories from many points of view—political, philosophical, metaphysical, and psychoanalytic—often evaluating the tales as products of Carroll's neuroses and as reactions to Victorian culture. Because of the nightmarish qualities of Alice's adventures and their violent, even sadistic, elements, a few commentators have suggested that the Alice books are inappropriate for children; as a result, the stories are not always enjoyed by the audience for whom they were apparently intended.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the most notable things in the Alice books is the hallucinatory quality of the characters and plot, due to Alice's dreaming. The use of dream sequences as a plot device is common in most surreal literature; here are a few other works that may—or may not—be based simply on a dream.

Finnegans Wake (1939), a novel by James Joyce. In this notoriously difficult novel, plots and characters often change for no reason, and the title character is usually either dead or dreaming.

The Wizard of Oz (1939), a film directed by Victor Fleming. In this classic based upon L. Frank Baum's Oz books, farm girl Dorothy gets swept up in a tornado and lands in a magical land—or is she really just asleep back in Kansas?

The Mad Hatter (1978), an album by Chick Corea. Based specifically on the Alice books, this jazz fusion album features songs titled after Alice's dream and often sounds dreamy and discordant.

However, Carroll is consistently applauded as one of the world's foremost writers of nonsense, an author who successfully combined the logical with the illogical in two timeless novels that have fascinated children and adults alike.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Read one of Carroll's "nonsense" poems such as "Jabberwocky" or *The Hunting of the Snark*. Why are they considered nonsensical? In what ways do they, as Carroll asserted, display their own sort of logic and pattern?
- How does Dodgson's knowledge of mathematics come into play in the Alice books? Find specific examples of logic or mathematical principles.
- 3. One notable characteristic of Carroll's Alice books is their focus on the rules of acceptable behavior in confusing and nonsensical worlds. One notable example is the tea party with the Mad Hatter. Find additional examples of this theme in either book. How do you think this reflects the rules of the Victorian society in which Carroll lived? How might these works be seen as a parallel to a child's learning the rules of the adult world?
- 4. Carroll first used his famous pen name on a poem written for adults and published in 1856. Why do you think Carroll used a pen name for many of his works? How does his pen name reflect his fondness for wordplay?

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Magela Carter

BORN: 1940, Eastbourne, England DIED: 1992, London, England

NATIONALITY: English
GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman (1972)

Fireworks (1974)

The Bloody Chamber, and Other Stories (1979)

Wise Children (1991)

Burning Your Boats (1995)

Overview

Angela Carter, who during her life was mainly known as an author of novels, nonfiction essays, plays, and children's books, was also a short-story writer. During her short life she published three collections of short stories—Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces (1974), The Bloody Chamber, and Other Stories (1979), and Black Venus (1985). Two additional collections, American Ghosts and Old World Wonders (1993) and Burning Your Boats (1995), were published posthumously. Each of these collections bears the originality that has determined Carter's place among the most highly regarded British



Angela Carter Carter, Angela, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

writers of the end of the twentieth century. Her writing is noted for its vivid prose, gothic settings, eroticism, violence, use of fantasy and fairy tales, and surrealism that combine to form what Victoria Glendinning of the *New Statesman* called "the world of Freudian dream and futuristic fiction and pornography."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A "Gently Untidy" Childhood Angela Carter was born Angela Olive Stalker on May 7, 1940, in Eastbourne, England. Her father, Hugh Alexander Stalker, originally came from Scotland. He worked as a journalist and was in his mid-forties when Angela was born. Her mother, Olive Farthing Stalker, originally came from South Yorkshire. Because Eastbourne was located close to the English Channel, and therefore close to the occupying German army stationed along the French coast during World War II, Carter and her mother, brother, and grandmother moved to South Yorkshire to avoid being caught in German air attacks on England.

After the war, the family moved to Balham, South London, where Carter went to school. The picture Carter paints of her family life in Alison Lee's book *Angela Carter* (1997) is warm and affectionate, and her descrip-

tion of her childhood home emphasizes a dreamlike atmosphere that would later be reflected in the surreal tone of her works: "Life passed at a languorous pace, everything was gently untidy, and none of the clocks ever told the right time."

First Publications In 1960 Angela married Paul Carter. They moved to Bristol where, in 1965, Carter graduated from Bristol University with a degree in English literature. In 1966 she published her first novel, Shadow Dance, followed in 1967 by The Magic Toyshop and in 1968 by Several Perceptions. For The Magic Toyshop Carter received the Llewellen Rhys Memorial Prize, and for Several Perceptions she won the Somerset Maugham Award. In 1968 Carter separated from her husband and then divorced him in 1972. She used the money she received for her books to travel to Japan "to experience life in a culture that is not Judeo-Christian." She lived and worked there for almost three years, from 1969 to 1972.

In 1974 she published her first collection of short stories, *Fireworks*, which was partly inspired by her stay in Japan. In the afterword, Carter explains the connection between Japan and the structure of her short stories: "I started to write short pieces, when I was living in a room too small to write a novel in. So the size of my room modified what I did inside it and it was the same with the pieces themselves."

Finding a Niche In 1975 Carter began to write for New Society. Between 1976 and 1978 she worked as a fellow in creative writing at Sheffield University. In 1979 she published her second collection of short stories, The Bloody Chamber, and Other Stories, which won the Cheltenham Festival of Literature Award. The stories "The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves" are variations of Charles Perrault's fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood". This twist earned her the reputation of being her era's Mother Goose, albeit a much darker version. Carter continued to exploit traditional tales, exposing not only the tales' inherent violence and chauvinism, but also revealing the nature of storytelling.

In 1977 Carter settled down with new husband Mark Pearce in Clapham, South London. Between 1980 and 1981 Carter worked as a visiting professor in the Writing Program at Brown University in the United States. In November 1983, when she was forty-three, she gave birth to her son, Alexander Pearce. Despite the birth of her child, between 1984 and 1988 Carter led a nomadic life. For three years, she taught part-time at England's University of East Anglia. In 1984 she was also a writer in residence at the University of Adelaide, South Australia.

Last Years Carter's last novel, Wise Children, published in 1991, was her acknowledged favorite. In 1991 Carter was diagnosed with lung cancer. She died at her home on February 16, 1992. In 1993 her fourth collection of short stories, American Ghosts and Old World

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Carter's famous contemporaries include:

Margaret Thatcher (1925–): Prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990 and leader of the Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990.

Queen Elizabeth II (1926–): Reigning queen of the United Kingdom, and a romantic and legendary figurehead.

Margaret Atwood (1939–): Canadian writer who emphasizes women's roles and also uses fairy tales and legends in her works.

Salman Rushdie (1947–): Controversial British-Indian writer who uses magic realism, particularly in his renowned *Midnight's Children*.

Wonders, was published, and in 1995 her last one, Burning Your Boats, appeared in print. Before her death, Carter provided extensive directions on how to deal with her literary estate. Her main concerns were related to her husband and her son—she desired for her works to provide an income for them, stating that "any one of her fifteen books could be set to music or acted on ice."

Angela Carter's experiments with narrative form and her use of fairy-tale and real-life characters may have been the reason, as Salman Rushdie writes in his introduction to *Burning Your Boats*, that she was "dismissed by many in her lifetime as a marginal, cultish figure, an exotic hothouse flower." Since her death, however, Carter has become, at British universities, one of the most studied of late-twentieth-century writers.

Works in Literary Context

Stories within Stories One of Carter's most lauded literary techniques is the doubling of narrative frames. Her celebrated tale "The Loves of Lady Purple," for example, is a story within a story. The frame of the story is a puppet show, given in different cities and countries by "the Asiatic professor." But the story itself is about a perverse, cruel vampire who, as a punishment for her perversities, forfeits her vitality and is transformed into a puppet, used for presentations by the Asiatic professor, who worships her as a puppet because she is an embodiment of his art. Perhaps the most interesting part of the story is the transition between the frame story and the story itself, when the frame story becomes part of the unreal illusory theatrical story. The puppet, the object of art, through love, power, and faith of the artist in his own art, returns to life to become once again what she had been, whereas the frame, the show, and the Asiatic professor cease to exist, overcome by the power of his

creation, which in this case is a destructive evil. This theme has recurred in art and literature since the Renaissance. The relationships between the artist, art, and art's destructive power have fascinated artists, poets, and writers through the centuries. In this story Carter finds her own original way to introduce this theme.

The Beauty and the Beast Carter also established her creative genius by reinterpreting fairy tales to reflect the concerns of her own time and gender. The Courtship of Mr. Lyon, for example, is based on the fairy tale "The Beauty and the Beast." As in the original story, "the Beauty" saves "the Beast." In another story, "The Tiger's Bride," the Beauty becomes an animal in order to reunite with the Beast, the Tiger. The Beauty, when confronted with the choice of returning to a human state and to her father—who sent her to the Beast as payment for his gambling losses—chooses to stay with the animal, who is more noble and generous than the unworthy human.

Alternatively, in the story "The Lady of the House of Love," the Beast is a young, beautiful girl who is also a vampire, and in this story, the Beauty is a young man with whom the young girl falls in love and through whose love she is saved from the unhappiness related to her nature, because of which she is forced to kill in order to survive, something that she hates to do.

Works in Critical Context

Overall Reception During Carter's life and after her death in 1992, literary critics tried to decide on the literary trend to which her works belong. Some perceive her as a writer of the gothic; others associate her with magic realism. Her short stories, however, are distinctly postmodern. As the critical responses to Carter's work multiply and the debate over its meaning and significance grows, however, it has become clear that her writing is more ambivalent, its implications darker, than a label such as "postmodern" suggests.

The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman In her 1972 novel—the product, like some of the Fireworks stories, of two years she spent in Japan-imaginary animals step out of paintings and reflections escape from mirrors to invade the realm of the real. Such fantastic plot elements made her early work difficult to characterize. While writers as diverse as Anthony Burgess and John Hawkes expressed great admiration for her writing, other reviewers were unimpressed. The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman was ignored or treated with incomprehension and contempt by most mainstream critics. For many readers, the presence of the fantastic was unacceptable when it demanded direct and sustained attention. The reception of Carter's writing had changed along with the writing itself between the 1960s, when despite being seen as strange she won two major British literary prizes, and the 1970s, when she returned from Japan more radically self-conscious and aggressive in her re-creation of her heritage.

Wise Children and Posthumous Success English theater culture is the territory of her last novel, Wise Children. It traces the history of the fictional Hazard theatrical dynasty. The Hazards are mirrored and mocked by the illegitimate, female branch of the family, represented by elderly twins Dora and Nora Chance, who had their own vaudeville careers and live in indecorous retirement on the wrong side of the Thames. Salman Rushdie, in an obituary for the author in the New York Times, states, "Angela's last novel, Wise Children, was also her finest." In her review for the Nation, Ann Saltow notes that the book "offers aesthetic pleasure like a gift to the reader....Like Shakespeare, Carter is a crowd-pleaser." Carter's death from cancer, coming soon after its publication, hastened its acceptance as one of the canonical texts of the postmodern feminist sensibility.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Look up the terms and decide for yourself whether you think Carter's writing is gothic, magic realist, or postmodern.
- 2. Carter and the Canadian author Margaret Atwood have often been compared with each other. Can you find similarities, perhaps in Atwood's novel *Surfacing*, and Carter's story "The Company of Wolves"?
- 3. Why do you think critics were apprehensive about Carter's stories? Why do you think she won so many awards despite this criticism?
- 4. How does Carter portray animals in "The Company of Wolves"? What might the wolves represent?
- 5. Why does Carter choose to manipulate fairy tales? Is she hoping to educate us about something? What? Be sure to identify which elements of fairy tales Carter adopts and which she rejects.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Angela Carter played with traditional fairy tales, sometimes making them more violent or more beautiful than they initially were. Sometimes she merely elaborated on a common theme, and other times she used the original story to reveal something about our modern era. Here are some other works that use old tales to reveal new truths.

Bluebeard's Egg (1983), a collection by Margaret Atwood. In this collection, Atwood's heroines are faced with duplicitous men modeled after the traditional scoundrel, Bluebeard.

Bluebeard (1987), a novel by Kurt Vonnegut. In this fictionalized autobiography of a painter, the narrator's secrets are kept in a potato barn.

Stranger Things Happen (2001), stories by Kelly Link. In this collection of short stories, classical villains and heroes make an appearance in modern-day America.

Pan's Labyrinth (2006), a film by Guillermo del Toro. In this movie, a young girl uses traditional fantasy elements—including dark woods and talking animals—to help her escape the harsh realities of the Spanish Civil War.

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Rosalia de Castro

BORN: 1837, Santiago de Compostela, Spain DIED: 1885, Santiago de Compostela, Spain

NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Cantares gallegos (Galician Songs; 1863) En las orillas del Sar (Beside the River Sar; 1884)

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Castro's famous contemporaries include:

Queen Victoria (1819–1901): Victoria was the queen of England from 1937 until 1901, making her the longest-reigning British monarch in history.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886): Dickinson is considered to be one of the most important nineteenth-century American poets, though almost none of her poems was published during her lifetime.

Eduardo Pondal (1835–1917): Pondal was a Galician poet who attempted to restore the status of the Galician language.

W. S. Gilbert (1836–1911): Gilbert, an English theatrical writer, is best known for his collaboration with Arthur Sullivan on comic light operas.

Paul Cézanne (1839–1906): Cézanne, a French postimpressionist painter, marked a transition from nineteenthto twentieth-century art.

Joaquim María Machado de Assis (1839–1908):
Machado was a Brazilian writer widely recognized as the most important figure in Brazilian literature.

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928): Hardy was an English writer whose poetry was part of the naturalist movement.

Overview

Rosalia de Castro was an acknowledged master of Spanish poetry who wrote intimate, musical verse mainly in her native Galician (a dialect similar to Portuguese), incorporating the folk themes, political problems, and longings of her people in her poetry.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Personal and Political Turmoil Castro was born to an unwed Spanish noblewoman. Raised by an aunt to age eleven, she spent her teens in her grandparents' home, where she was educated in languages and the arts. Despite her talent in music, art, and writing (she composed her first poem at age twelve), Castro was an unhappy youth. Many critics attribute her melancholy, which deepened year by year, to the stigma surrounding her birth, which forced her to be separated from her mother.

Castro lived in an era of political turmoil in Spain. In the decades before her birth, France—under the rule of Napoléon Bonaparte—had taken control of the Spanish monarchy and ruled the country as a client state. While Spanish rebels ultimately defeated the French occupying forces in 1814, Spain's economy was devastated by the occupation and conflict. Social unrest was common for the next fifty years, and in 1868 the Spanish monarchy was once again driven out—this time by rebels—during the Glorious Revolution. Such unrest may have fueled interest in traditional Spanish and Galician culture, which was viewed with nostalgia by those who longed for simpler times. This interest ultimately shaped Castro's work and enduring popularity.

The Flowering of a Galician Poet At age nineteen, Castro moved to Madrid, where she became involved with literary circles and published La flor (The Flower), an inconsequential collection of poems in Spanish. The following year, she married Manuel Murguría, a historian and a champion of the Galician literary renaissance. Although their marriage was troubled by financial difficulties, ill health, and the deaths of two of their six children, Murguría always encouraged his wife's writing. It was through his prompting that Castro agreed to publish Galician Songs, the Galician verses that brought her acclaim as an important poet.

Her skill increased in *Follas novas* (*New Leaves*), another book on Galician themes, which is tinged with a darker and more personal tone than *Galician Songs*. With *Beside the River Sar* (1884), written in Spanish rather than Galician, she won national attention. This collection, which was composed when Castro was suffering from cancer, reflects a more personal and subjective tone. She died in 1885.

Works in Literary Context

Galician Concerns Castro composed chiefly in her native Galician, writing poetry about the Galician countryside and longings of the Galician people. Castro added to these her own deep nostalgia, love of nature, and a pervasive melancholy. Her poetry, while simple in form, is mystical, religious, and highly symbolic in content. The subject matter of her works is primarily regional concerns, yet her poetry also probes the human soul in a manner that makes it universally relevant.

While her contemporaries adhered to a rigid poetic structure in their works, Castro used a lilting, fluid metrical style. Her simple, musical prosody, emotional themes, and natural symbols and motifs are seen by critics as influences on the work of such modern poets as Ruben Dario, Amado Nervo, and Federico García Lorca.

Works in Critical Context

Castro is widely considered one of the greatest practitioners of regionalism in Spanish literature. Critics consider that her studies of the Galician province, which brought her into literary prominence, have broader value because of her universal concerns.

According to L. A. Warren, Castro "is the greatest of modern Spanish poets, [Gustavo Adolfo] Bécquer being the only alternative, and ranks level with the two greatest mystical lyrical poets of the golden century, Fray Luis de Leon and San Juan de la Cruz." Gerald Brenan stated: "Had she written in Castilian rather than in her native Galician dialect, she would, I feel sure, be recognized as the greatest woman poet of modern times."

Galician Songs Critics usually cite Galician Songs as the catalyst for the Galician cultural revival that took place in the nineteenth century. Recent critical attention has focused on feminist aspects of Castro's writing. Michelle C. Geoffrion-Vinci points out that Galician Songs contains poems that "decry the mistreatment of women and Galicia, both of which occupied highly marginalized positions within the framework of 19th-century Spanish society."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Castro wrote her final collection of poems *Beside the River Sar* while suffering from cancer. In what ways can you see despair over this illness in these works? What aspects of the poetry demonstrate her efforts to soothe herself and cope with dying?
- 2. Does Castro's depiction of women as caregivers resonate with present-day women? In what ways are her female figures a product of the time, and in what ways are they universally relevant?
- 3. Castro's admirers assert that she has universal relevance despite her regional Galician themes. Write an argumentative essay that defends or attacks this assertion.
- 4. Castro depicted outdoor settings with a strong sense of the peace and serenity that they brought. Write a poem or short descriptive essay that re-creates an outdoor setting in a similar manner.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Castro composed her final collection of poems while suffering from cancer; the poems in this collection show her attempting to make sense of this experience. Here are some other works that show authors attempting to deal with illness and dying:

"Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (1951), a poem by Dylan Thomas. In this poem, the speaker urges his father to fight against his impending death.

"Kaddish"(1961), a poem by Allen Ginsberg. This poem is about the death of the author's mother.

Can You Come Here Where I Am? (1998), edited by Rita Busch. This collection of poetry contains works by authors fighting and coping with breast cancer.

図 Constantine Cavafy

BORN: 1863, Alexandria, Egypt DIED: 1933, Alexandria, Egypt NATIONALITY: Egyptian, Greek

GENRE: *Poetry* MAJOR WORKS:

"Waiting for the Barbarians" (1904)

"The City" (1910)

"Ithaca" (1911)

"Exiles" (1914)

Overview

Constantine Cavafy is considered the first modernist Greek poet. He revolutionized Greek poetry while highlighting clear affinities with Hellenistic poetry of the Alexandrian era.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Cosmopolitan Youth Constantine P. Cavafy was born Konstantinos Petrou Kavafis in Alexandria, Egypt, to a Greek family. His father was a successful importer-exporter whose business led him frequently to England. When Cavafy's father died, the family moved to Liverpool, England. It was there that Cavafy began his poetic efforts. He took a liking to William Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde and created verse in English. He was also fascinated by history, especially ancient Greek (Hellenistic) and ancient Roman (Byzantine) history; this fondness for ancient Greece and Rome figured prominently in Cavafy's poetry.

Cavafy's older brothers ultimately bankrupted the family business through mismanagement. Cavafy's mother



Constantine Cavafy © Margot Granitsas / The Image Works

took him to Constantinople (now Istanbul), where they lived for three years. Then his mother returned to her Greek homeland with Cavafy and several of his siblings; his older brothers remained in Alexandria. The adolescent Cavafy continued writing poems, but he eventually joined his older brothers in Alexandria and found work as a newspaper correspondent.

A Private Poet In 1885, when Cavafy returned to Alexandria, he obtained a position as a clerk of the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works. He stayed at the ministry for the next thirty years, eventually becoming its assistant director. Cavafy was an obscure poet, living in relative seclusion and publishing little of his work. He preferred to circulate his verse among friends. A short collection of his poetry was privately printed in the early 1900s. In 1933, eleven years after leaving the ministry, he died of cancer.

Works in Literary Context

Cavafy's early poems exhibit the influence of the symbolist and decadent movements in late-nineteenth-century European literature. They often express the melancholy typical of *fin de siècle* (end of the century) poetry. Cavafy later repudiated this self-consciously poetic quality for a spare, prosaic style, which he developed to perfection in his mature poems. Often called a poet of old age, Cavafy denied his poetry displays of linguistic virtuosity, empha-

sizing instead his experience and perceptions stated with the greatest possible plainness. His language was flat and direct. He consciously avoided a dependence on metaphor and imagery, preferring a straightforward comment.

Classical Tragic Themes Cavafy drew upon the entire history of the Greek language, from its most elevated to its most vulgar forms. He did so to provide a simple reworking of a few tragic themes. Foremost among these themes is that of human mortality and the sense of beauty, frustration, and loss that derives from it.

Among his other major themes are art, politics, homosexuality, and the moral character and psychology of individuals. His poetry also displays a fatalistic existential nostalgia as well as an uncertainty about the future.

History and Politics with a Personal Vision Cavafy was an avid student of history, particularly ancient civilizations, and in a great number of poems he subjectively rendered life during the Greek and Roman empires. Most of his poems are set in the outland regions under Roman conquest during the declining years of the empire. They feature both historic characters, such as Nero and Julius Caesar, and fictional ones, often Greek poets and artisans who commemorate some recurring theme in Cavafy's ancient world. Among these themes are the vanity of worldly triumph, the transient nature of human life, and the tragedy of a precarious existence relieved only by transcendent moments of romantic passion. Cavafy called himself "an historical poet," but his thematic concerns are nonetheless modern as well as being extremely personal.

In his poetry Cavafy was inspired by parallels between the modern age and that of the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman periods. George Seferis, among others, points out that in a Cavafy poem the past illuminates and illustrates the present, as well as documents the state of the poet's mind and spirit. Throughout the poetry, the hedonism of Rome comes to represent the pitfalls as well as the glorious moments of sensual indulgence, just as the new religion of Christianity represents an austere but satisfying alternative to the ultimate futility of a life based on eroticism. These opposing themes frequently arise in Cavafy's love poems, in which he portrays homosexual relationships without guilt or sentimentality.

Cavafy's most important poems, however, impart his personal vision on politics and history. In "Waiting for the Barbarians" for example, Cavafy documents the ironically enthusiastic response with which a civilized culture greeted insurgent barbarism. In "Ithaca" he conveys that the journey to one's destination is more important than the arrival, and in "The City" he warns that to leave one's city amounts to an unsuccessful escape from oneself.

Works in Critical Context

Cavafy has been recognized in Greece and the wider literary community as one of the great poets of the twentieth century. His poetry led to a revival of modern Greek poetry as well as an upsurge in the international recognition of Greek poetry in general. Cavafy's reputation continued to grow after his death. His works are now taught in Greek schools and in universities throughout the world.

Critics often find Cavafy's value to reside in his particular tone of voice, which conveys a pagan sensitivity to physical pleasure and a painful sense of tragic futility. Some critics note the untranslatability of Cavafy's better elements, but his works have been translated by a number of prominent writers, including the American poets James Merrill and Robert Pinsky. W. H. Auden, who wrote an introduction to a translation of Cavafy's works, suggests that what is most distinctive about Cavafy's poetry is not what can be translated, but "a tone of voice, a personal speech." Auden acknowledges Cavafy's influence on his own work, even though he only ever read him in translation because Auden did not know modern Greek.

"Waiting for the Barbarians" "Waiting for the Barbarians" is generally recognized as one of Cavafy's most accomplished and enduring creations. C. M. Bowra, in an essay for The Creative Experiment, states that in the poem, "Cavafy produces a real myth, a story which stands firmly in its own right and yet is rich in universal significance." Kimon Friar in The New Republic writes, "Waiting for the Barbarians is deeply moving to those who understand the secret temptation in the hearts of free men to cast off their responsibilities and yield themselves to directing power." Many critics have commented on the tragic message of the work, despite its comic touches. Renato Poggiolo, writing in Harvard Literary Bulletin, states of the poem, "What renders its ending really unhappy is that there is neither release nor relief, or more simply, that there is no ending at all."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Cavafy sets most of his poems in the ancient world. How does this choice impact the themes he is able to explore? Would he be able to explore the themes he has chosen as successfully in a modern setting?
- 2. Cavafy lived an isolated and pained life, partly because of negative attitudes about homosexuality. How do you think this cultural isolation is reflected in his poetry?
- 3. "The City" can be read as a warning that leaving your hometown will be an unsuccessful escape from yourself. Write a first-person story about leaving home that follows this sentiment.
- 4. Read the poem "Waiting for the Barbarians" and discuss the poem's relevance in today's society.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cavafy's famous contemporaries include:

- **Anton Chekhov** (1860–1904): Chekhov was a Russian playwright and short-story writer whose innovations influenced the development of the modern short story.
- **Edith Wharton** (1862–1937): Wharton was an American novelist known for chronicling the high society of her time
- Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949): Maeterlinck was a Belgian playwright who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1911.
- **Constantin Stanislavski** (1863–1938): Stanislavski, a Russian actor and theater director, founded the school of modern realistic acting that continues to dominate theater to this day.
- **Henry Ford** (1863–1947): This American entrepreneur and industrialist is credited with bringing modern production methods to the manufacture of automobiles.
- **Erik Karlfeldt** (1864–1931): Karlfeldt was a Swedish poet of the symbolist school who was granted the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1931 after his death.
- **William Butler Yeats** (1865–1939): Yeats was an Irish poet and dramatist widely considered one of the most important figures in twentieth-century literature.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Many of Cavafy's works are set in ancient Greece and Rome. Here are some other modern works set in the same period:

Count Belisarius (1938), a novel by Robert Graves. This novel is a fictionalized retelling of the life of a real Byzantine general who lived in the sixth century CE.

The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel (1938), a poem by Nikos Kazantzakis. This epic poem continues the adventures of Homer's classic character Odysseus.

Quo Vadis (1895), a novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz. This historical novel centers around the love between a young Christian woman and a Roman nobleman during the time of the emperor Nero.

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Margaret Cavendish

BORN: 1623, Colchester, England DIED: 1673, Welbeck, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Poems, and Fancies (1653) Philosophicall Fancies (1653)

The Worlds Olio (1655)

The Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince William Cavendishe, Duke, Marquess, and Earl of Newcastle (1667)

Overview

Margaret Lucas Cavendish, first Duchess of Newcastle, remains one of the most remarkable authors of the midseventeenth century. Praised by the influential philosophers and university faculty of her day, ridiculed by contemporary literati and later biographers, she published thirteen separate volumes of poetry and prose

between 1653 and 1668, seeing most of her books through two or more revised editions during the same period. Although her works range from poetry, plays, and prose fiction to letters, orations, and natural philosophy, she has been noted most often as the writer of her husband's biography. Some three hundred years after her death, the range and complexity of Margaret Cavendish's writings are being reconsidered, especially in the context of social history, and she is being acknowledged as an important and underrated figure in the history of English literature.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up Royalist Records of the birth of Margaret Lucas were lost during the English Civil Wars in the 1640s, but she was probably born in 1623, just outside Colchester. She was the youngest in a family of eight children, consisting of three sons and five daughters. Her father, Thomas Lucas, died when she was two; the most formative influence upon her, therefore, was her mother, Elizabeth Leighton Lucas. Within the family, relationships were warm and loving, but strangers were kept at arm's length, perhaps because the Lucases were Royalists, whereas most of their neighbors supported Parliament. Royalists were those who supported the rightful rule of King Charles I of England; during the 1640s, a growing number of dissatisfied British citizens mostly Puritans, a religious denomination the king sought to eliminate—favored the removal of the king and the establishment of a commonwealth. This eventually occurred in 1649, when King Charles I was executed and England came under the rule of Puritan military commander Oliver Cromwell. Possibly as a result of her family's unpopular Royalist background, Margaret grew up to be afflicted by a terrible bashfulness that left its mark on both her practice and her theory of rhetoric. She received what little education she had at home from a governess and visiting tutors. Not a keen student, she greatly preferred to amuse herself by writing—scribbling, as she called it—and by designing her own clothes.

Flight and Exile Margaret's happy family life was violently disrupted in 1641, when the British political situation reached a crisis: never popular with their Puritan neighbors, the Lucases were attacked in their family home. In 1642 Margaret and her mother fled to Oxford, where King Charles held his court in exile; in 1643 Margaret became maid of honor to Queen Henrietta Maria, whom she accompanied in 1644 when the queen escaped to France. There, in the spring of 1645, she met William Cavendish, Marquis of Newcastle, whom she married in December of that year. Her husband was a great influence on her throughout her life. He encouraged



Margaret Cavendish Hulton Archive / Getty Images

her to write, supplemented her scanty education, paid for the publication of her books, and above all gave her confidence. He was himself a patron of the arts and sciences, and his brother Charles was a noted scholar. Childless, and without a great house and estate to care for, Margaret Cavendish amused herself in the early years of her marriage by writing, first in Paris, later in Rotterdam, and finally in Antwerp. The turning point of her career, however, was a visit to England begun in 1651. She had returned, escorted by her brother-in-law, to try to claim a portion of her husband's sequestered estates. During the eighteen months she spent there, she wrote constantly and also arranged for the publication of her first two books, *Poems, and Fancies* (1653) and *Philosophicall Fancies* (1653).

Cavendish returned to her husband in Antwerp early in 1653. She completed work on her rhetorical theory in *The Worlds Olio*, published in 1655 but begun before her

departure to England at the end of 1651. It is a curious work, rather like an informal conversation, flitting from one subject to another in disconnected fashion, with no serious sustained discussion of any issue.

Return and Last Years In 1660, with the onset of the Restoration—the return of the traditional English monarchy, as well as those nobles who had also been exiled—Margaret Cavendish and her husband were finally able to return to England. For a while they lived in London, but they soon found the court of Charles II uncongenial and before the end of 1660 had retired to their estate at Welbeck. Once settled there, Cavendish resumed her life as a writer, publishing material she had worked on during her exile. She also made a serious effort to improve her overall education, studying philosophy and revising her philosophical works in the light of her new knowledge.

In The Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince William Cavendishe, Duke, Marquess, and Earl of Newcastle (1667) Cavendish's love and admiration for her husband shine clearly through her prose, which is simple, direct, and sincere. In the preface she lays out what would now be called her methodology and her preference for the simple truth. This preface also makes it clear that even toward the end of her life Cavendish was still ambivalent about rhetoric—admiring of its power to adorn, suspicious of its power to deceive—and above all, unhappy about her own lack of training in it.

Margaret Cavendish's last years were clouded by disputes with her husband's children and false accusations from his servants. She died suddenly on December 15, 1673, and was buried in Westminster Abbey on January 7, 1674. Her husband was not well enough to attend her funeral and two years later was interred with her, on January 22, 1676. Before he died, however, he collected all the letters and poems written to celebrate her and arranged to have them published as *Letters and Poems in Honour of the Incomparable Princess, Margaret, Dutchess of Newcastle*, which demonstrated that universities, philosophers, and gentleman poets had showered her with flattering words, even as peers had ridiculed her in private letters and diaries.

Works in Literary Context

Gender Issues Cavendish's first collection of plays, though written during her exile, was not published until 1662, the original manuscript having been lost at sea. The prefatory material includes a discussion of gender: here, as in *The Worlds Olio*, Cavendish shows a clear recognition of the difference between masculine and feminine styles and their different uses. She does not suggest that women are naturally inferior. She argues that because discourse must be adjusted to particular audiences and circumstances, one cannot expect the orator to



Margaret Cavendish Cavendish, Margaret, photograph. © Bettmann / Corbis.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cavendish's famous contemporaries include:

Ben Jonson (1572–1637): English playwright most famous for *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640): Flemish Baroque painter at whose house Cavendish stayed during her exile.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679): English political philosopher known for his book *Leviathan*.

René Descartes (1596–1650): Seventeenth-century French rationalist and the founder of Cartesian philosophy.

use the same style in private conversation as in public speech. On the relationship between speaking and writing, she asserts that the best writers are not usually the best speakers; and women cannot be good writers because they talk too much.

Rhetoric and Speech Cavendish emphasizes the relationship between thought and speech, or *ratio* and *ora-*

tio, in the terms of Latin rhetoric used then. Like many of her contemporaries, she regards rhetoric as the art of expression only; she is contemptuous and, indeed, suspicious of it. The business of rhetoric is merely to dress thought; she compares the rhetorician to the tailor. Yet, dress and rhetoric have their own importance and must be appropriate to the occasion; and she acknowledges that "want of eloquence" can conceal or misrepresent the truth.

She rules that passionate speeches must be delivered in a tenor or even a bass voice, not a treble, to give due weight and solemnity. She even gives advice about the use of lips, teeth, and tongue to achieve the desired effect. Her dislike of the artificial style extends to a horror of the pedantic, the fussily correct: she even states that "it is against nature for women to spell right." A good style has ease and simplicity, which are more important than mere accuracy.

Works in Critical Context

Cavendish's works were not well received in her own day. Two celebrated diarists made fun of her: Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, who wrote a rude ballad about her visit to the Royal Society on May 30, 1667. She also had admirers, however: Mildmay Fane, Earl of Westmorland, wrote a poem in her honor on the flyleaf of his copy of *Poems, and Fancies*; in addition, John Dryden congratulated Newcastle on his wife's "masculine style." In the twentieth century Virginia Woolf valued her work, though she also made trenchant criticisms of it. Only in the latter part of the twentieth century, however, did Cavendish's importance begin to be recognized. Many contemporary scholars are now engaged in studying her works, and there is a flourishing Margaret Cavendish Society.

Natures Pictures and the Female Role A question that necessarily arises for contemporary scholars is whether or not Margaret Cavendish should be regarded as an early feminist. She certainly paved the way for the feminists who came later; however, she evinces little of that solidarity with other women that characterizes feminism. In fact, at the beginning of Natures Pictures she not only confesses to extraordinary ambition but also admits that she does not want to share her glory with other women: "I dare not examin the former times, for fear I should meet with such of my Sex that have outdone all the glory I can aime at." An alternative approach is to see Cavendish in terms of the aristocratic culture of her own time, one that adopted an ideology of display. Hero Chalmers discusses Cavendish as an aristocrat in "Dismantling the Myth of 'Mad Madge': The Cultural Context of Margaret Cavendish's Authorial Self-Presentation" (1997). Diana Barnes reinforces this approach in "The Restoration of Royalist Form in Margaret Cavendish's Sociable Letters" (2001).

Responses to Literature

- 1. Take a look at some of Cavendish's writing and determine whether or not she is a feminist. What makes you think this? What do you think a feminist is?
- 2. Why do you think Cavendish was ignored in her day? Was it only because she was a female writer?
- 3. Cavendish is decidedly un-Aristotelian. Research his rhetorical work and determine where they differ.
- 4. How do Cavendish's royalist tendencies come into play in her writing and thinking? What do monarchs and aristocrats symbolize in her work?

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Cavendish was known for her preoccupation with rhetoric, with the idea of words and sentences as effective means of communication. Logic, law, and philosophy all rely heavily on rhetoric, and its practitioners have long been revered in Western culture. Here are some other works that explore the nature of communication and argument.

The Art of Rhetoric (fourth century BCE), a treatise by Aristotle. This famous work outlines the need for logos, ethos, and pathos in effective dialogue.

Copia: Foundations of the Abundant Style (1512), a work by Desiderius Erasmus. A study of trends in style and an affirmation of the need for style in most writing.

Everything's an Argument (2006), a nonfiction work by Andrea A. Lunsford and John J. Ruszkiewicz. This book identifies and discusses rhetoric in modern culture, with a special emphasis on the visual rhetoric used in current advertising.

Of Grammatology (1967), a nonfiction work by Jacques Derrida. A modern look at the functions and results of language and writing.

Marilo José Cela

BORN: 1916, Iria Flavia, Padrón, Galicia,

Spain

DIED: 2002, Madrid, Spain NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Drama, fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

The Family of Pascual Duarte (1942) Journey to the Alcarria (1948)

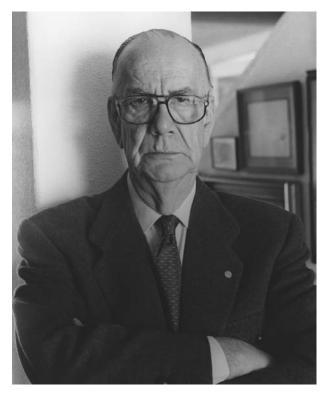
The Hive (1951)

Secret Dictionary (1968)

San Camilo, 1936 (1969)

Overview

A pivotal figure in twentieth-century Spanish literature, Camilo José Cela is best known for his stylistically diverse works of fiction that convey the social legacy of the Spanish Civil War. His first major novel, *The Family of Pascual Duarte* (1942), signaled the revival of Spain's tradition of literary excellence, and Spanish culture's gradual recovery from the civil war of 1936–1939. Throughout the repressive regime of General Francisco Franco, Cela suffered from governmental censorship. Nevertheless, he remained in Spain rather than going into exile and expressed himself audaciously in more than seventy works of literature, including essays, travelogues,



Camilo José Cela Cela, Camilo Jose, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

short stories, dramas, and poetry. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1989.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Wounded in Civil War Camilo José Manuel Juan Ramon Cela y Trulock was born in Iria Flavia (O Coruna), Spain, on May 11, 1916, to a Spanish father and English mother. His father worked as a customs official, and in 1933 the family moved permanently to Madrid. His eccentricities began to take root in his university years (1933–1936 and 1939–1943), during which he began and abandoned studies in philosophy, medicine, and law, without earning a degree. In 1934 a severe bout with tuberculosis changed his life. During his recovery, he read a seventy-one-volume collection of Spanish literature, fostering his literary aspirations.

Cela began writing poetry. His first collection was written in 1936, the first year of the Spanish Civil War, but not published until 1945. After war broke out in Spain, he was drafted into Franco's Nationalist army, and wounded in battle. Franco defeated his antifascist opponents and established a dictatorship in April 1939. World War II started five months later.

Discharged from the military in 1939, Cela worked as a bullfighter, a painter, an actor, a civil servant in Franco's government—and even, briefly, as a censor.

From 1940, when he began to frequent the literary soirées at Madrid's Cafe Gijon, the way was paved for the prolific output of his next six decades.

The Family of Pascual Duarte and Early Acclaim Cela earned critical acclaim at age twenty-six with his first novel, The Family of Pascual Duarte. The novel relates, in the form of a memoir written to a friend, the life of a convicted murderer awaiting execution. Pascual responds to a life of poverty and frustration by killing his dog, his horse, his wife's lover, and finally, his mother. He continually proclaims his repentance, but ultimately the reader must question Pascual's sincerity and the cause of his murderous acts. Contradictions, gaps, and ambiguities plague the narrative.

The brutal atmosphere of this novel resonated with a nation recovering from a brutal conflict. Upon publication, however, its shocking and sordid details were condemned by censors and critics alike. Government censors, deeming *Pascual Duarte* the product of a depraved mind, seized the novel's second edition in 1943 and held it for two years until it was again published in Spain. Since then, however, the book has gone through more than 250 editions, making it the second most widely read Spanish novel of all time, after Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Ouixote*.

Cela later called his second novel the antithesis of his first. *Rest Home* (1944) examines the private anguish of tuberculosis patients confined to a sanatorium; the work admittedly stems from the author's firsthand experience with the illness. Even critics of Cela's first novel praised this one for its sensitivity and lyricism. *Rest Home* illustrates Cela's delight in structural symmetry: the novel is divided into two equal parts, each subdivided into seven chapters that correspond to the seven dying patientnarrators, six of whom are identified only by numbers.

Radical Nonconformity Following the publication of his second novel, Cela entered a period of great productivity. He published a modern update of a famous sixteenth-century picaresque novel, New Adventures and Misfortunes of Lazarillo de Tormes (1944), and rapidly produced several collections of short stories. Journey to the Alcarria (1948) was the first of several collections of travel sketches recounting his vagabundajes (vagabond journeys) through the Iberian Peninsula. It won accolades for its atypical approach to the travel genre.

The Hive (1951) is generally considered Cela's greatest work. It was first published in Argentina, because Spanish censors objected to its themes of depravity, hunger, and oppression. Set in Madrid in 1940, a time of severe wartime shortages, it is a social panorama chronicling three days in the lives of some three hundred characters who frequent a seedy cafe. Plunged midstream into the mundane conversations of Madrid's teeming masses, one gets the impression of overhearing clandestine sexual encounters, illicit propositions, and other private matters, amid the nervousness of a society just

getting used to a regime in which suspicious behavior or criticism of the new government warranted prosecution. A dead body turns up the first evening, and various incidents and bits of information begin to form story lines that might unravel the murder.

Cela's works, starting with *Pascual Duarte*, confirm his radical nonconformity. The repression and censorship that became a way of life under Franco's regime were catalysts for Cela's artistic boldness and penchant for scandal. Cela intentionally fashioned the public persona of a literary outlaw, and his work continually pushed the boundaries of propriety. The novel *Mrs. Caldwell Speaks to Her Son* (1953) shocked the Spanish reading public with its taboo-driven theme. In two hundred short chapters, an elderly Englishwoman's rambling letters to her dead son reveal her incestuous love for him.

Upholder of Obscenity Cela was now a leading literary figure. He moved to the island of Majorca in 1956, and founded a journal, Papers from Son Armadans, which became a vital outlet for young anti-Franco writers. In 1957, he was inducted into the Royal Spanish Academy of Language. He befriended artists such as Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso; the latter contributed drawings to Cela's Bundle of Loveless Fables (1962).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Cela furthered his iconoclastic departure from literary conventions and Catholic moral codes with works such as his *Secret Dictionary* (1968), a book of slang and obscene words, and *Encyclopedia of Eroticism* (1977). His innovative works, increasingly sexual and scatological, nevertheless received critical acclaim. As the Franco dictatorship waned, his topical essays began appearing in Spanish newspapers; these were later republished in numerous collections, into the 1990s.

Stylistic Experiments His later novels were consistently experimental, starting with Eve, Feast, and Octave of St. Camillus's Day 1936 in Madrid (1969; commonly called San Camilo, 1936). This work employs a hallucinatory, paragraph-free stream-of-consciousness narrative to examine the start of the Spanish Civil War. No capital letters appear in office of darkness 5 (1973); Christ versus Arizona (1988) consists of one single sentence, over a hundred pages long.

Two years after Franco's death in 1975, Cela was appointed to the Spanish parliament by King Juan Carlos I. During the transition to democracy, he helped draft the Spanish constitution of 1978. He won several prestigious literary prizes in the 1980s and 1990s, culminating with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1989. In his later years, his private life and scandalous behavior drew more attention than his writing, which continued at a prolific rate. He died in 2002, at the age of eighty-five.

Works in Literary Context

Camilo José Cela's bold literary style is rooted in European realism of the nineteenth century, and especially in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cela's famous contemporaries include:

Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980): Cuban novelist and musicologist who was an early practitioner of magic realism.

Octavio Paz (1914–1998): Mexican poet and essayist; Nobel Prize winner (1990).

Albert Camus (1916–1960): French/Algerian existentialist novelist and philosopher.

Augusto Roa Bastos (1917–2006): Paraguayan novelist; author of the classic 'dictator novel,' *I the Supreme*.

José Saramago (1922–): Portuguese writer known for his subversive political and religious perspectives; Nobel Prize winner (1988).

Joan Miró (1893–1983): Spanish painter whose surrealist works challenged bourgeois cultural norms.

Francisco Franco (1892–1975): Spanish dictator, 1936–1975.

Spain's Generation of 1898, who attacked the moral hypocrisy of Spanish society after the nation's defeat in the Spanish-American War. *The Family of Pascual Duarte* was also inspired by the Spanish tradition of the picaresque—satirical adventure novels with roguish heroes, such as the sixteenth-century novella *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Critics also frequently compare Cela with American writer John Dos Passos; both wrote cinematic novels with shifting time sequences and a panoply of characters.

Tremendismo Cela's grotesque portrayal of illicit and repulsive aspects of Spanish society initiated a literary trend in Spain later called *tremendismo*. The term is vague, but it seems to denote a type of fiction that dwells on the darker side of life. For Cela, this emphasis on cruelty and graphic vulgarity, and subject matter that would customarily be off-limits for Spanish readers, reflects his commitment to defying Spain's traditionalist, Catholic moral codes. This devotion to free expression led to censorship trouble and charges of indecency within Spain, but was an essential characteristic of his body of work, in fiction and nonfiction alike.

Patterns Stylistic experimentation is a constant feature of Cela's fiction. His later work features a decreasing emphasis on plot—the sequence of cause and effect is largely discarded—and an increasing emphasis on artificial patternings of events. The fragmented narrative of The Hive and the short micro-chapters of San Camilo, 1936 are examples. In his prologue to Mrs. Caldwell Speaks to Her Son, titled "A Few Words to Whoever Might Read This," Cela speaks of the "clock novel...made of multiple wheels and tiny pieces which work together in

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Camilo José Cela's novel *The Family of Pascual Duarte* is a modern version of the picaresque, a genre incorporating social satire in an adventure format. The word *picaresque* comes from the Spanish word *picaro* (rogue); the protagonist of a picaresque novel is frequently a rascal, or denizen of the lower ranks of society. It is an enduring literary genre, as these titles from the contemporary era attest.

On the Road (1957), a novel by Jack Kerouac. The story of Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty (Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady) is the definitive work of the Beat generation and an influential piece of Americana.

Eva Luna (1985), a novel by Isabel Allende. This story of a poor orphan is both a romance and a portrait of a South American society undergoing revolution.

Harlot's Ghost (1992), a novel by Norman Mailer. A fourteen-hundred-page novel that sets one man's story against the early history of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Tipping the Velvet (1998), a novel by Sarah Waters. A young "oyster girl" falls for a music-hall male impersonator, and discovers her lesbianism, in this rollicking novel set in Victorian England.

Madonna from Russia (2005), a novel by Yuri Druzhnikov. In this recent novel by a respected émigré novelist, the character Lily Bourbon starts out as a Petrograd streetwalker, becomes a leading Soviet poet, then escapes to America.

harmony." With this mechanical approach to constructing fiction, Cela imposes order upon what he perceives as a chaotic universe.

Spain's Debt to Cela Cela has had an enormous impact on succeeding generations of Spanish writers. Much of the Spanish intelligentsia fled into exile as Franco came to power; Cela stayed and revived the nation's literary tradition in a repressive era. At first, he collaborated with the regime, but later he served the cause of artistic freedom through his publication of Papers from Son Armadans and through his own literary provocations. The literature and art of contemporary, democratic Spain are indebted to the free expression Cela exercised.

Works in Critical Context

Despite the huge size of Camilo José Cela's body of work, his reputation rests on his two most celebrated novels, *The Family of Pascual Duarte* and *The Hive.* Both faced censorship in Spain, yet achieved critical and commercial success—phenomenal success in the case of *Pascual Duarte*.

Many of his other works were popular with readers, including his travelogues and the novel *Mazurka for Two Dead Men* (1983), which won Spain's National Prize.

Spanish Conservatism The conservative nature of Spanish culture, which has persisted into the nation's democratic era, affected critical reception to Cela at home. As Christopher Maurer wrote in the New Republic, "Cela has long been a household word in Spain, though not a polite one." Beyond the issues of censorship, Spanish conservatives condemned Pascual Duarte and tremendismo as offensive to the nation's moral sensibilities. A significant minority of critics continued to take offense to the rebellious and uninhibited nature of Cela's voice. Outside Spain, critics tended to view tremendismo as a legitimate attempt to depict the corrupt and violent nature of life under fascist dictatorship.

Later Reception Reaction to Cela's later books was also varied. Their stylistic innovations, while praised by postmodern critics, made them less accessible to the general reader; meanwhile, their ever-escalating obscenity, and Cela's controversial public behavior, led conservatives to declare him an embarrassment. Conservatives were not the only Spaniards unenthusiastic about Cela's winning the Nobel Prize. Some political leftists never forgave Cela for his early support for Franco and his regime. His political commitments were somewhat ambiguous, but his allegiance to moral and artistic freedom was unstinting. Many non-Spaniards familiar with his work view it as almost an embodiment of Spain's experience in the twentieth century.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Do some reading about the Spanish Civil War. Reflecting on Cela's fiction, write about the different ways he presents the war's impact on Spanish society.
- 2. Why do you think *The Family of Pascual Duarte* was banned in Spain? Conversely, why do you think its popularity has proven so enduring there?
- 3. Do you think Cela's fascination with obscenity represents a simple pursuit of shock value, or does it have a larger purpose?
- 4. Some critics say that the main character of *The Hive* is the city of Madrid itself. Do you agree, and in what respect does the novel portray Madrid as a character?
- 5. What do Cela's stylistic experiments, like the booklength sentence of *Christ versus Arizona*, contribute to the experience or meaning of his work?

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Paul Celan

BORN: 1920, Czernovitz, Romania

DIED: 1970, Paris, France NATIONALITY: Romanian GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

"Death Fugue" (1944)

The Sand from the Urns (1948)

Edgar Jené and the Dream of the Dream (1948)

Counter-Light (1949)

Poppy and Memory (1952)

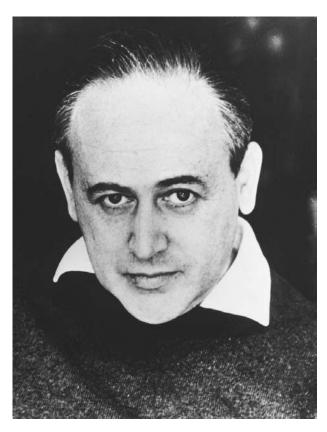
"Conversation in the Mountains" (1960)

Overview

Paul Celan (pronounced say-LAHN, the pen name of Paul Antschel), whom critic George Steiner has called "almost certainly the major European poet of the period after 1945," is known primarily for his verse. Yet his reputation as a lyric poet overshadows a small but significant body of prose works that deserve attention both for their close links to his poetry and as independent creations.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Jewish Heritage and the Holocaust Paul Antschel, the only child of Jewish parents Leo Antschel-Teitler and Friederike Schrager, was born in Czernovitz, capital of



Paul Celan Imagno / Getty Images

the Romanian province of Bukovina, on November 23, 1920. He grew up in a multilingual environment. German, the language spoken at home and in some of the schools he attended, remained his mother tongue throughout his life, and Vienna was the cultural center of his youth; but his language of daily speech was Romanian. Before his bar mitzvah, he studied Hebrew for three years, and by the time he began a year of premedical studies at the École préparatoire de Médecine in Tours, France, in 1938, he was also fluent in French. Returning to Czernovitz shortly before the outbreak of World War II, he learned Russian at the university and, after Soviet troops occupied Bukovina in 1940, in the streets.

When German troops captured the city in 1941, Antschel's parents were deported and shot, but he survived. After eighteen months at forced labor for the Germans, he escaped to the Soviet Red Army and returned to Czernovitz, which was again under Russian control. There, sometime in late 1944, he wrote "Death Fugue," one of the most powerful poems written about the Holocaust. The work was based both on his own experiences in a labor camp in Romania and on reports he had heard of conditions in the harsher Polish concentration camps. The poem was included in his first two poetry collections, *The Sand from the Urns* (1948) and *Poppy and Memory* (1952).

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Celan's famous contemporaries include:

Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970): Hebrew fiction writer and Nobel Prize–winning writer laureate who contributed much to Hebrew literature.

Margaret Burbidge (1919–): English astrophysicist known for several achievements, including discovering the nuclear process of stars and codeveloping the faint object spectrograph for the Hubble telescope.

Dorothy Dandridge (1923–1965): Actress, singer, and dancer; she was the first African American to be nominated for an Academy Award—for her starring role in *Carmen Jones*

Nelly Sachs (1891–1970): German poet, playwright, and friend to Paul Celan, whom she called "brother." She expressed the pain and suffering of the Jewish condition.

Prose and the Surrealist Circle Leaving Czernovitz in 1945 for Bucharest, Antschel joined a surrealist circle, became friends with leading Romanian writers, and worked as a translator and reader in a publishing house. For his prose translations from Russian into Romanian—primarily of Mikhail Lermontov, Konstantin Simonov, and Anton Chekhov—and for publication of his own poems, he used several pseudonyms before rearranging the letters of Ancel, the Romanian form of his surname, into Celan in 1947.

Sometime between 1945 and 1947, he wrote a twopage prose fragment that has survived under the title "A Stylus Noiselessly Hops..." (1980). This work is one of many that reveal his indebtedness to surrealism. Late in 1947, Celan went to Vienna, where he joined a circle of leading avant-garde painters, writers, and publishers. His friendship with painter Edgar Jené gave rise to a brief prose piece, "The Lance," which he and Jené wrote jointly early in 1948 and circulated on photocopied sheets to announce a reading of surrealist texts as part of an exhibition of surrealist painters in Vienna.

A second prose piece, "Edgar Jené and the Dream of the Dream" (1948), written at about the same time as "The Lance," purports to be a discussion of Jené's paintings but is actually a confessional essay on what happens in the "deep sea" of the writer's mind, the "huge crystal of the internal world" into which he follows Jené and where he explores his paintings. Leaving Vienna in July 1948, Celan settled in Paris and began studies in German language and literature. In March 1949 the Swiss journal *Die Tat* published a collection of his brilliant but enigmatic aphorisms—quick, pithy words of wisdom—titled "Counter-Light."

German Translator Celan took his Licence des Lettres in 1950. In 1952 he married graphic artist Gisèle de Lestrange, with whom he had a son, Eric, who was born in 1955. Though he wrote no original prose for almost ten years, the works Celan chose to translate into German were usually prose. He never gave up German as his mother tongue, telling a friend, "Only in one's mother tongue can one express one's own truth. In a foreign language, the poet lies." Though all of these translations reflect Celan's unique prose style, one reveals almost more of himself than of the original: his rendering of Jean Cayrol's prose narration for Alain Resnais' Night and Fog (1956), a film on the Holocaust that Celan endowed with an authentic Jewish voice for Germanspeaking viewers.

The address he delivered upon receiving the Bremen Literary Prize in 1958 (translated in 1969) is Celan's most personal prose work. After referring to the Bukovinian landscape of his youth and his acquaintance with Martin Buber's Hasidic tales in this world "where humans and books lived," the address becomes a discussion of his relationship to the German language. This language, he says, "had to pass...through a frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of death-bringing speech." From its miraculous survival, he now attempts to write "in order to speak, to orient myself... to outline reality."

German Reader In 1959 Celan became a reader in German language and literature at L'École Normale Superieure, a position he held until his death. While in the Swiss Alps in July 1959 he was supposed to meet Theodor Adorno at Sils-Maria. Forced to return to Paris before they met, Celan composed "Conversation in the Mountains" (1960) the following month, a reflection on this missed encounter. He later called it a "jabber" or "schmooze" between himself and Adorno.

Suicide at Fifty In early May 1970, Paris officials found Celan's body in the Seine River. He had been missing since the middle of April. Sometime before his suicide, Celan produced his final prose work, a brief address delivered to the Hebrew Writers' Association in October 1969 during a trip to Israel; it was published in the Tel Aviv magazine Die Stimme in August 1970. In the address Celan expresses gratitude for discovering in Israel an "external and internal landscape" conducive to creating great poetry in the surrealist style. In his address, he compares these two landscapes: "I understand...the grateful pride in every homegrown green thing that stands ready to refresh anyone who comes by; just as I comprehend the joy in every newly won, self-felt word that rushes up to strengthen him who is receptive to it."

Works in Literary Context

The Salvation of Language For Celan after the Holocaust, language was the only thing that remained

"reachable." Through language he sought to verify his existence. He felt the only way language could make sense of the world was by way of contradiction, paradox, or ambiguity. One way he felt he could achieve this was through surrealism. "The Lance," for instance, consists of typical surrealist images: "rainbowfish" flying through the sky, a giant hammer in the air, and waves beating against treetops. It ends with speakers casting nets into the water—an image also found in Celan's early poems. The work also contains a dialogue, the format that became a hallmark of his later prose works.

Creative extensions and elaborations of his poetry, Celan's prose works also express the struggle to reclaim language in a nonpoetic age and the need for dialogue as a means of connecting oneself with and orienting oneself in the modern world. His Bremen Literary Prize acceptance speech given in 1958 and reproduced in *The Meridian* (1961) demonstrates these aims. It is written as a dialogue with his listeners, punctuated by reservations or uncertainties about the poet's craft, leading the listener/reader through a labyrinth of images relating to the poet's quest for speech in an age when speech has become nearly impossible.

Influences A speaker of several languages and a man of profound experiences, including great loss, Celan was influenced by many things. He had great appreciation for Israel and his Jewish heritage. He also carried an unshakable feeling of persecution after the devastation he experienced in Nazi labor camps. After he read the works of authors like Martin Buber and Franz Kafka, and with his knowledge of languages, he was inspired to develop one of his most important relationships—with the German language, one of the few elements of his spiritual existence that he did not lose and that he believed offered a security against further loss. As scholar Joan Peterson suggests, "The ways in which [his] poems represent mourning and address rage and despair place[s] [him] at the center of artistic response to the Holocaust, and [he] continues to influence those who write about it."

Works in Critical Context

Celan's earlier poetry was harshly criticized by peers such as the members of Group 47, a postwar literary group that challenged modern conventions. That which he read aloud in a vocal style in the tradition of Hungarian folk poems, for example, was poorly received by his German audiences. But because it was difficult to write poetry after the Holocaust and equally difficult to approach it with any unaffected criticism, Celan decided that the best way to write was to set language free from history. As *Books and Writers* notes, Celan made the conscious decision and "went with my very being toward language." Both his poetry and his prose work soon became not only respected but revered, known, adds *Books and Writers*, "for its broken syntax and radical minimalism, expressing

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by other post–World War II writers who were also deeply affected by the Holocaust:

Collected Later Poems (2003), a poetry collection by Anthony Hecht. In this collection of three volumes of poetry, the expressions of Hecht's experiences as a World War II liberator who witnessed the atrocities firsthand reveal an intense focus and profound sentiment

Night (1955), a memoir by Elie Wiesel. In this brief but powerful memoir, the author recounts his experiences as a young Orthodox Jew imprisoned at Auschwitz and Buchenwald

The Shawl (1990), a collection of fiction by Cynthia Ozick. In this small volume that includes two novellas, the author tells the intimate story of Holocaust survivor Rosa Lublin, who loses her children and her soul.

Man's Search for Meaning (1945), a nonfiction work by Viktor Frankl. In this nonfiction book, the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist retells his experiences as a Holocaust victim and puts forth a philosophy and a therapy of existential healing.

his perception of the shattered world in which he lived." By the end of his life, Celan had developed a reputation as a German surrealist writer, a linguistic craftsperson, and a poet of Jewish concerns with several awards to his credit—a reputation that continues today. These talents are demonstrated in such works as "Counter-Light," as well as his most famous poem, "Death Fugue."

"Counter-Light" (1949) In this collection, what are considered by some scholars as brilliant but enigmatic aphorisms appear surrealistic in their subversion of conventional time and of space and object relationships: trees fly to birds, hours jump out of the clock, a woman hates a mirror's vanity. Behind them lies a Kafkaesque awareness that the world makes no sense. These pieces express Celan's understanding that it seems that only in the paradox of new language combinations can the world be made coherent. Only in a dialectic of contradictions can truth be rendered.

"Death Fugue" Despite the many works that followed, "Death Fugue" is widely considered Celan's most powerful and most successful work. However, scholar Rex Last has described the poem as "somewhat untypical of his work at large, in that it is rhythmical, fluent and relatively accessible: image succeeds image in bold and fluent patterns which contrast strikingly with the sparse and almost inscrutable verses of the more mature Celan."

Last also states, "This incantatory, hypnotic fugue of death is one of the pinnacles of twentieth-century German poetry..." The most notable negative assessment of the poem, in fact, comes from the author Celan himself, who in later years regarded it as too direct in its message.

Responses to Literature

- Do an Internet search for cultural, historical, and political links that will enhance your understanding of the background and forces that influenced Paul Celan. For example, you may want to investigate the conditions in Romania during World War II. Or you may choose to research Group 47, the German literary association with which Celan was briefly associated.
- 2. Celan is considered a surrealist poet. Surrealism contains a number of unique characteristics, including:
 - an intermingling of dreams and reality
 - "impossible" environments that could not exist in the real world
 - objects becoming animated or combined with other things
 - objects appearing in unexpected places or in unexpected scale
- 3. Go to the Louvre Web site or another major metropolitan museum online. Look at surrealist art such as that of Salvador Dali, Giorgi De Chirico, Edgar Jené, or Max Ernst. Discuss with others what you find to be surrealist about the work (or a particular work) of these artists. Then, using the same list of surrealistic characteristics, find as many examples of surrealism as you can in Celan's work. For example, what is dreamlike in his writing? Discuss with others, noting examples that are different from the ones you came up with.
- 4. Visit the Museum of Jewish Heritage online. Investigate the artifacts, art, and diary entries found on the second floor, which features the Holocaust Memorial material. Decide on one particular aspect of the Holocaust that interests you and that you would like to become the group "expert" on. Each person in the group will do the same. Then, each person should print out information on the chosen aspect, print out a poem that has relevance, and write a preliminary report that will be shared with the group along with the chosen poem.
- 5. Write a poem influenced by a major event in your life or in your community. For instance, you may choose to write about the events of September 11, 2001, or express your feelings and opinions about the 2008 presidential race. Choose anything that you feel passionately about, much like Celan wrote with

profound feeling about the genocide of his Jewish compatriots.

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Marie Louis-Ferdinand Céline

BORN: 1894, Courbevoie, France

DIED: 1961, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: French

NATIONALITI. Tremen

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Journey to the End of the Night (1934)

Death on the Installment Plan (1936)

Castle to Castle (1957)

North (1960)



Louis-Ferdinand Céline © Apis / Sygma / Corbis

Overview

French novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline is considered a clear, honest voice of the 1930s and 1940s. It was not until the 1960s, however, that the literary community began to accept Céline as a major figure and to evaluate his work in unbiased terms. Openly vocal about his anti-Semitism, Céline was accused of collaborating with Nazis during World War II, and he faced an opposition so strong that his work faded into obscurity. Only when Céline's name was cleared twenty years later were the French allowed exposure to his life and work. When his writing became available to the public, readers learned that Céline was a skilled artist whose experiments with language and the structure of the novel have influenced writers all over the world.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Cosmopolitan Upbringing Louis-Ferdinand Destouches, who adopted the pseudonym Céline from his grandmother's maiden name, was born in Courbevoie, France, a suburb of Paris, on May 27, 1894. He was the only child of Ferdinand-Auguste Destouches, an insurance executive, and Marguerite-Louise Guilloux Destouches, a business owner. At the age of thirteen, Céline was sent to schools in England and Germany to learn the languages of those countries; such cultural exposure was unusual for a middle-class French boy.

World War I Céline enlisted in the French cavalry in 1912, and soon after, Europe erupted in war. Beginning

with the assassination of Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, the countries of Europe aligned with Germany on one side and the Allied powers—France, Russia, and the United Kingdom—on the other in an attempt to establish control over the region. France provided over 8 million troops to the cause, two-thirds of whom were either killed or wounded during combat.

Céline was one of these, sustaining a grave injury to his arm while he was on the front line in Flanders. Afraid that doctors would amputate his arm instead of trying to save it, Céline refused anesthesia so that he could monitor the doctors' work. Because of his arm injury, as well as severe damage to his hearing, Céline was granted a threemonth convalescent leave in January 1915 and underwent surgery on his injured arm. Soon afterward, he was judged unfit for further combat duty and released from military obligation with a medal for heroic conduct under fire. His right arm remained partially paralyzed for the rest of his life.

Céline Becomes a Doctor In 1915–1916, Céline worked in the passport office of the French Consulate in London. He then spent a year working for a French lumber company in Africa before returning to France and taking a position with the Rockefeller Foundation. On behalf of the foundation, he toured the French province of Brittany and gave lectures on tuberculosis. At the same time, he studied medicine at the University of Rennes, where he received a degree in 1919. He married that same year.

After earning a medical degree in 1924, Céline entered private medical practice and settled in Rennes with his wife and young daughter. Conventional married life, however, did not appeal to him, and he left his family in 1925 to work for the League of Nations—a precursor to the United Nations created after World War I—traveling throughout Europe and North America on its behalf. By the late 1920s, Céline was practicing medicine in France again. He took a position with a municipal clinic in 1931, where he worked almost exclusively with the poor. From that point until the end of his life, Céline practiced medicine only among the needy, despite the financial hardships associated with that choice. He argued that he could not in good conscience make money from the suffering of others.

Céline Turns to Literature When he was thirty-two, Céline began writing fiction while working as a doctor. His first work, a novel titled Journey to the End of the Night, took him five years to write. When it was finally completed in 1932, the one-thousand-page manuscript was submitted to two French publishing houses, Gallimard and Denoel. Gallimard found the book too controversial, but Robert Denoel, a new publisher who had debuted several other controversial manuscripts, accepted Céline's novel. In an effort to separate his

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Céline's famous contemporaries include:

Henry Ford (1863–1947): American automobile maker who is credited with making his Model T affordable enough for the average person by using an assembly-line construction process that reduced the time it took to produce a car.

Robert Graves (1895–1985): English poet, novelist, and scholar who won the James Tait Memorial Prize in 1934. Carl Jung (1875–1961): Swiss psychiatrist who introduced the idea of archetypes—sets of basic ideas and concepts that he felt all humans shared—to the field of psychiatry.

Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935): Considered one of the greatest Portuguese poets of all time.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973): Preeminent Spanish artist who worked in a variety of media, including paint and ceramics

Khalil Gibran (1883–1931): Lebanese poet and artist whose best-known work is *The Prophet*.

medical career from his literary one, the author published the work under his Céline pseudonym.

When the Soviet Union would not send him royalties from the Russian translation of *Journey to the End of the Night*, Céline visited the country in 1936. As a result of that trip, Céline wrote the first of four political works that attacked the Soviet Union, calling it a vicious dictatorship based on materialism. According to Céline, citizens of the Soviet Union lived in filth and were exploited by a corrupt new ruling class—the Communist Party.

During World War II, as France became largely occupied by German forces, Céline wrote several pamphlets that were viewed as anti-Semitic, or negative toward Jews. When Allies landed in Normandy in June 1944, Céline decided to leave Paris because he predicted he would soon be arrested, denied a fair trial, and quite possibly be executed on charges of collaborating with the enemy due to his anti-Semitism and hostility toward communism. After Céline and his third wife, whom he had married the year before, left Paris in July 1944, his apartment was ransacked, and his library and papers destroyed. Céline visited hospitals in Berlin and settled in a town north of the city. In November 1944, Céline moved to the German town of Sigmaringen, where the wartime French Vichy government, which operated under the authority of the Germans, fled after the liberation of France. There he worked as a physician until he traveled to Copenhagen, Denmark, in March 1945, supposedly to recover money that he had hidden in a friend's backyard before the war.

In April 1945, a French court issued a warrant for Céline's arrest as a Nazi collaborator. When French officials in Copenhagen demanded that Céline be exiled immediately, the Danes responded by imprisoning him for fourteen months and his wife for two. In poor health, Céline was hospitalized in February 1947. When he recovered four months later, he was freed on the condition that he would remain in Denmark, where he lived until he was granted amnesty in April 1951. He spent the last ten years of his life just outside of Paris, where he worked as a physician until he died from a stroke in July 1961.

Works in Literary Context

Céline's contribution to literature is primarily a result of his use of the French language—including all the grit and grime of street slang—and unconventional plotting. His novels are long and composed of crude first-person narration and disjointed plots, oftentimes disorienting the reader.

Revolutions in Form and Language Céline's controversial novels are marked by misanthropic narrators, free-wheeling verbal attacks, ferocious humor, and squalid settings ranging from the jungles of Africa to the factories of Detroit. His unrestrained language is a unique combination of French slang, profanity, street grammar, and near-delirium, while his episodic plots are laced with acidic satire. Céline's work has often been compared to that of earlier writers, including Arthur Rimbaud and Charles Baudelaire. Some argue that Céline's novels are unmatched in their anger and depravity.

While it is true that other writers had tackled topics like madness and rage, most of these representations had been drawn from the language of the educated and confined by the limits of the traditional novel form. Céline's peculiar approach—to match the language and form of the novel to its theme and to the characters themselves—led to new interpretations of the novel as a literary form. No longer could readers observe the delirium of characters with the protection of refinement and convention. In Céline and other writers such as Mark Z. Danielewski, who also uses slang and unconventional plotting techniques, one is immersed in the world of the delirious—in the exact way the novelists choose—through the language the novelists use.

Art as a Powerful Force Although Fairy-Tale for Another Time is not considered a strong novel in itself, it presents Céline's concept of artistic creation. Amidst a backdrop of World War II, Fairy-Tale is Céline's attempt to incorporate other arts, including painting, film, and ballet, into a novel. He portrays art as a force that can make or unmake the universe; art's evil, destructive quality is tempered by a character whose purpose is to restore harmony and balance. The success of Fairy-Tale is in Céline's construction of a work of art that is not restricted

by one form or point of view. Because of this freedom, it invites readings from a variety of perspectives.

Legacy By the time of his death in 1961, Céline had claimed a place in contemporary French literature. Céline is widely known for his influence on other writers because he created new possibilities for what the novel as form could be. In Céline and His Vision, Erika Ostrovsky noted that Céline's work "consists of the creation of a new tone, a literary ambience which pervades an entire sector of modern letters and exceeds the limits of national boundaries or personal orientation and background." Among those he is credited with influencing are Henry Miller, William Burroughs, and Thomas Pynchon.

Works in Critical Context

Despite his influence on many reputable writers, Céline's literary significance is still questioned by some critics. One critic harshly commented that Céline was "an angry old man talking, talking," and that "it will take a critic more patient than most of us to sift through his ravings and decide if there is anything in it." Also doubtful of Céline's achievement is Henri Peyre who, in his book *French Novelists of Today*, criticized "the monotony of Céline's inspiration, the artificiality of his language and the 'pompierisme' of his tawdry sentimentality."

Journey to the End of the Night According to Irving Howe in his book A World More Attractive: A View of Modern Literature and Politics, Journey to the End of the Night is composed "as a series of loosely-related episodes, a string of surrealist burlesques, fables of horror and manic extravaganzas, each following upon the other with energy and speed." Writing in the New York Times, Anatole Broyard claimed that "in his first and best book, Journey to the End of the Night, Céline had hardly a good word for anybody, yet you felt that he was in closer touch with the human race, with people in the depths of their souls, than any other author in this century. And though Journey was distilled out of disgust, the aftertaste was not sour—as it so often is with modern French novels—but bittersweet. His disgust was a kind of curdled love."

Journey to the End of the Night was extraordinarily popular throughout Europe. In the New York Times Book Review, Mavis Gallant explained that "Céline's dark nihilism, his use of street language, the undertow of mystery and death that tugs at the novel from start to finish were wildly attractive to both Left and Right; both could read into it a prophecy about collapse, the end of shoddy democracy, the death of sickened Europe." Leon Daudet of the reactionary newspaper L'Action Française fought unsuccessfully to have Céline awarded the prestigious Prix Goncourt. Soviet revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote in the Atlantic Monthly that Céline "walked into great literature as other men walk into their own homes." The reading public made Journey a best seller. "Céline's cynicism and denunciations seemed to speak for everyone ...," Allen Thiher wrote in his Céline: The Novel as Delirium, "[His]

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Céline used French slang in his novels to brilliant effect, much like William Shakespeare exploited the English slang of his time. As long as a distinction between "proper" language and "slang," has existed, authors have explored the differences between the two. Listed below are several other works distinguished by their contrasts of slang and traditionally appropriate language:

The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (2007), a novel by Junot Diaz. Written in the first-person point of view, this novel captures the Spanish-English slang of its Dominican American narrator.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (1595), a drama by Shakespeare. This play introduces characters whose language is virtually incomprehensible to other characters because of its combination of slang and botched attempts at "proper" language.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), a novel by Mark Twain. Twain took extreme care to represent the language of his characters accurately in this American classic, even pointing out his efforts in his introduction to the book.

The Sound and the Fury (1929), a novel by William Faulkner. In this work, Faulkner attempts to capture the language of the South, including that of a developmentally disabled protagonist.

popular, obscene language was like a violent gust of fresh air breaking into the literary climate." Attacks against the book's obscenity merely provoked more interest and increased sales.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Slang is a nonstandard variation of a language, and using slang in a novel drastically alters the overall effect—the tone and sometimes even the meaning—of the work. In order to understand how the use of slang changes the meaning and mood of a text, choose a passage from a classic novel written in proper English—something by Charles Dickens or Jane Austen would be appropriate—and rewrite it in a slang of your choice. For example, you could take the opening page or two of *A Tale of Two Cities* and rewrite it in text-message language.
- 2. Read *Journey to the End of the Night*. In what ways does Céline challenge popular conceptions of "good" and "bad" characters? Is the novel moral or immoral? Cite specific examples from the text.
- 3. *Journey to the End of the Night* was praised by both left- and right-wing political extremists. Consider

Céline's controversial political beliefs. Why do you think Céline's novel appeals to both groups? What evidence can you find to determine if he presents a clear-cut political stance, both in his life and in his work.

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BORN: 1902, Seville, Spain
DIED: 1963, Mexico City, Mexico

NATIONALITY: Spanish GENRE: Poetry, criticism

MAJOR WORKS:

Reality and Desire (1936)

The Clouds (1940)

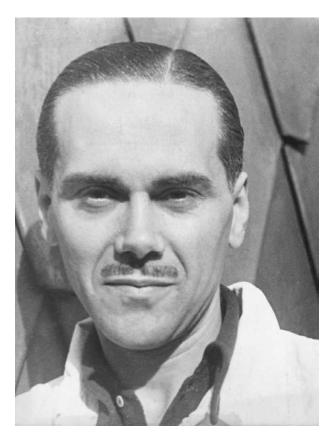
Desolation of the Chimera (1962)

Overview

A member of the "Generation of 1927" of Spanish modernist poets, Luis Cernuda wrote frank verses of both homosexual love and deep pessimism. His poetry is distinguished by its starkly solitary and individualistic spirit, its sharp social criticism, and its unrelenting self-examination in both spare and colloquial language. Famed Mexican poet Octavio Paz observed in a critical essay titled *On Poets and Others* that Cernuda's work, "is one of the most impressive personal testimonies to this truly unique situation of modern man: we are condemned to a promiscuous solitude and our prison is as large as the planet itself."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Desire, Love, and Alienation While Cernuda's pessimistic worldview has often been attributed to an intro-



Luis Cernuda Archivo de la Residencia de Estudiantes, Madrio

verted and sensitive character, critics also speculate that his melancholic, defiant poetic voice resulted from a painful sense of isolation brought about by his open homosexuality and years spent in exile abroad. Cernuda began writing poetry while still a law student at the University of Madrid. He became a protégé of the poet Pedro Salinas, who helped him publish his first verse collection, Perfil del aire (Profile of the Air) in 1927. The poet's highly refined lyric verses showed the influence of Salinas and his contemporary, Jorge Guillen, among others, and received only a lukewarm reception. Cernuda began finding his own voice in two collections of surrealist-influenced poetry, Un rio, un amor (A River, a Love, 1929) and Los placeres prohibidos (The Forbidden Pleasures, 1931). In these books, the poet experimented with incongruous word juxtapositions and spontaneous derivations from chance stimuli to express his sexual and metaphysical turmoil.

These verses also introduce a number of recurrent themes in Cernuda's work: desire and its relationship to love and reality; the hopeless search for wholeness and a yearning for oblivion; a deep hostility to the city and its imprisoning social conformity; and a keen appreciation of the transcendent mystery of nature. Also present in the poetry is the poet's negotiation of his experiences of homosexual love, in defiance of his time and culture.

"For Cernuda, love is a break with the social order and a joining with the natural world. He exalted as man's supreme experience the experience of love" wrote Octavio Paz. In still-Catholic Spain of the early twentieth century, this exaltation of homosexual love as a joining with the natural world—while hardly without important poetic predecessors (for example, Walt Whitman)—met with much resistance.

Cernuda published two additional important, surrealist-influenced collections in the mid-1930s, *Donde habite el olvido* (*Where Forgetfulness Dwells*) and *Invocaciones* (*Invocations*), before issuing the first edition of his definitive work, *La realidad y el deseo* (*Reality and Desire*), in 1936. A collection of new and previously published verse, this book was revised and expanded in subsequent editions to include most of Cernuda's poetry. Critics have pointed out that *La realidad y el deseo* can be read as the poet's emotional and spiritual autobiography. The book also chronicles Cernuda's stylistic development over the years.

War and the Pain of Exile A predominant theme in La realidad y el deseo is exile—both the spiritual exile Cernuda felt in Spanish society and the physical exile he experienced after the Spanish Civil War. The poet denounces such hallowed Spanish institutions as the patriarchal family and the Catholic Church, and decries the backwardness, intolerance, and violence he finds in his homeland. Yet in many poems from the subsequent collections Las nubes (The Clouds) and Como quien espera el alba (As One Awaiting Dawn), Cernuda also reveals a deep, nostalgic longing for the Andalusian gardens and sea of his childhood. Along with many of his contemporaries in literature and the arts, Cernuda left Spain shortly before the Republican defeat of 1939—the triumph of General Franco's dictatorship—and spent the remainder of his life in exile in Europe, the United States, and Mexico.

Las nubes (1940), Cernuda's first volume published abroad chronicles his concerns for Spain and the alienation he felt as a result of his separation from it. During his years as an expatriate, Cernuda was greatly influenced by the meditative poetry of Robert Browning and T. S. Eliot. In the collections Como quien espera el alba (1947), Vivir sin estar viviendo (To Live without Being Alive, 1949), and Con las horas contadas (With the Hours Counting Down, 1956), he increasingly shifted his ongoing search for self-knowledge through alternative voices and colloquial speech free of more flowery rhetoric. Cernuda's final collection, Desolacion de la quimera (Desolation of the Chimera, 1962), reflects his growing preoccupation with death in its summary of his lifelong search for self-affirmation. Critics observe that in these poems the perfect state of desire pursued in earlier collections loses its significance, while the quest itself becomes the primary motivation for Cernuda. Derek Harris has asserted: "The resolution with which he pursued his self-analysis, is, in the last resort, more important

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cernuda's famous contemporaries include:

- **William Carlos Williams** (1883–1963): One of the most celebrated U.S. poets of all time, Williams was associated with both modernism and imagism and was also a practicing physician for many years.
- **Salvador Dalí** (1904–1989): The quintessential surrealist painter, Dalí was born in Spain, but was fond of highlighting his Arab descent, tracing his lineage to the Moors who occupied southern Spain for close to eight hundred years.
- Fulgencio Batista (1901–1973): Military dictator of Cuba until his 1958 ousting by Fidel Castro's guerrilla movement; his downfall signaled the success of the Cuban Revolution
- James Joyce (1882–1941): One of the most highly regarded literary figures of the twentieth century, this Irishman is best known for his short stories and novels. These include *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922), and *Finnegans Wake* (1939).
- Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Borges's novels are beloved around the world, and he is considered by many to be the preeminent Argentine writer and thinker of the twentieth century.
- **Dwight D. Eisenhower** (1890–1969): Eisenhower was the thirty-fourth president of the United States, from 1953 to 1961; prior to his presidency, he commanded the Allied forces in their defeat of the Axis powers in Europe during World War II.

than his success or failure to find his ideal of harmony between reality and desire.... The clash between reality and desire in Cernuda's own life was the stimulus that led him to seek to come to an understanding of himself through his poetry, and by doing this, so to create himself in his poetry."

In addition to his verse, which appears in English translation in *The Poetry of Luis Cernuda* (1971) and *Selected Poems of Luis Cernuda* (1977), Cernuda published several highly regarded critical texts on modern Spanish poetry, including *Estudios sobre poesia espanola contemporanea* (*Studies on Contemporary Spanish Poetry*, 1957) and *Poesia y literatura* (*Poetry and Literature*, 1960).

Works in Literary Context

The Generation of 1927 Cernuda was a controversial member of the Generation of 1927, a group of important writers who revolutionized Spanish poetry by introducing innovative approaches and modern techniques to what had

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The experience of exile—so central to Cernuda's life and poetry—has been characterized by some as the quintessential experience of modernity. Between two world wars, famines, and environmental catastrophes of unprecedented magnitude, and work-related, semi-forced migration at levels never before seen, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have produced more experiences of—and more ways of experiencing—exile than any other period in human history. Here are a few other works by writers trying to come to terms with the experience of exile:

Doctor Faustus (1947), a novel by Thomas Mann. Nobel Prize winner Mann wrote this book in the United States, after fleeing both Nazi Germany and Switzerland during World War II. This novel is a fictional return to the Germany Mann left, and an attempt to come to terms with the society that had forced him out.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1962), a novel by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Drawn from the author's experiences in internal exile within the Soviet Union, this novel traces the steps of a prisoner in one of Joseph Stalin's forced-labor camps and focuses on the human response to a reduction to bare survival.

The Stone Face (1964), a novel by William Gardner Smith. The Stone Face is the story of an African American man who has fled the oppressive racism of the United States, only to find that what had seemed a safe haven in France is predicated on his complicity in French racism against Algerians. Though an exile in France, Smith's protagonist realizes that solidarity with the oppressed is the only viable option, even when that threatens his own status.

become a staid poetic tradition. Described as solipsistic in its incessant self-examination and universal in its moralistic vision, Cernuda's poetry promotes sexual desire, creative expression, and the recognition of natural beauty as the means of transcending mundane existence. In 1964, Octavio Paz asserted: "If it were possible to define in a phrase the place Cernuda occupies in modern Spanish-language poetry, I would say he is the poet who speaks not for all, but for each one of us who make up the all. And he wounds us in the core of that part of each of us 'which is not called glory, fortune, or ambition' but the truth of ourselves."

The poems in Cernuda's first two collections, *Perfil del aire* (1927) and *Egloga*, *elegia*, *oda* (*Eclogue*, *Elegy*, *Ode*, 1928), reflect his early interest in both Symbolism and classicism. While initially dismissed as facile, these works have been reassessed as impressive evocations of ambivalent adolescent emotions. After Cernuda became aware of his homosexuality during the late 1920s, he

began to express through surrealist verse the turmoil that he was experiencing. In many of the poems contained in *Un rio, un amor* (1929), *Los placeres prohibidos* (1931), and *Donde habite el olvido* (1934), Cernuda utilizes free association of images and events to express particular emotions and to voice his reaction to society's hostility toward his erotic desires. Stephen J. Summerhill commented: "Surrealism 'humanized' [Cernuda's] poetry in the sense that it encouraged him to speak his deepest passions for the first time; and it gave him an artistic form with which to control these feelings, which were always on the verge of being inexpressible."

A Return to the Real, and Beyond Influenced by early nineteenth-century German lyric poet Friedrich Hölderlin, Cernuda abandoned surrealism in Invocaciones (1934) in order to present his increasing personal alienation as a metaphor for the modern human condition. Cernuda's wider scope is further elaborated in La realidad y el deseo (1936), which critics term his "spiritual autobiography." Consisting of previously published and unpublished collections, this volume was revised on three occasions and ultimately encompassed nearly all of Cernuda's poetic work. As reflected in the title, which translates as "Reality and Desire," these poems reflect Cernuda's attempt to transcend reality and to achieve self-affirmation through understanding and fulfilling personal desires. Philip Silver commented: "As Cernuda employs it, deseo is eros, a 'desirous longing for.' It is the product of the radical solitude, the gesture of seeking to bridge the gulf between the poet and 'otherness,' for to desire is, in Cernuda's vocabulary, to long to be one with, and to be, the object of that desire." In Cernuda's poetry, sexual love ultimately gives way to poetic expression and nature as vehicles for eternal transcendence.

Works in Critical Context

Luis Cernuda's relationship with the reading public was uneasy from the outset of his poetic career. Although some reviews of his first book were encouraging, even enthusiastic, most were decidedly negative. Cernuda's reaction was bitter, though understandable in light of his total commitment to his craft—a craft that involved deep challenges to some of Spain's most cherished and intolerant institutions. Such an early and unflinching commitment also explains what was at times described as his fragile temperament and his unusual sensitivity to criticism. On the other hand, Cernuda was not only a most gifted poet but also a very acute reader of poetry—that of others as well as his own—and perceptive enough to realize that his continued experiments in poetic innovation would eventually earn him the attention of critics.

Residing in His Myth José Angel Valente places Cernuda at the forefront of the Generation of 1927, noting that "two poets, the two greatest of their generation, already reside in their myth: Lorca and Cernuda." This is not an isolated judgment. The important journal *La caña*

gris dedicated a 1962 issue to Cernuda, in which key critics were unstinting in their praise. Jacob Muñoz, editor of the issue, remarks on Cernuda's decisive impact on younger generations of poets; Juan Gil-Albert affirms that Cernuda "has become fully what he already was incipiently for many: the greatest Spanish poet of his time"; and Francisco Brines recalls his discovery of Cernuda's Como quien espera el alba (Like Someone Waiting for the Dawn, 1947), which he read "slowly and amazed." More recently, in considering the poem "Otras ruinas" ("Other Ruins"), literary critic Cecilia Enjuto-Rancel has noted that Cernuda "eschews the romantic vision of ruins, where the external landscape is a melancholic reflection of the speaker's internal conflicts, his ruined self. By contrast, these poems historicize the process of destruction, which is often caused by war and progress, not time and nature."

Desolation of the Chimera In Luis Cernuda: A Study of the Poetry (1973), Derek Harris describes Desolacion de la quimera as "an attempt to summarize the lessons [Cernuda] has learnt from the long investigation of himself. This final collection of poems is his own conclusion to his life, produced under the shadow of a presentiment that he was soon to die, a presentiment that turns this book into a poetic last will and testament designed to leave behind him an accurate self-portrait and a duly notarized statement of his account with life." Besides the occasional pieces and personal reminiscences, the principal topics dealt with in the collection are still love, Spain, and exile, as well as a series of poems on artists and on aesthetic experience. Love and art had been the central facts of Cernuda's existence. It was of fundamental importance at this late stage of his life for him to reassert them as the sufficient, powerful justifications of his being.

Responses to Literature

- 1. It is often mentioned as a mark in a poet's favor that his or her poems are universal. But much of what poets write about—such as Cernuda's experience of being homosexual in early twentieth-century Spain—is deeply personal. What do you make of Octavio Paz's assertion that Cernuda "is the poet who speaks not for all, but for each one of us who make up the all"? Is this different from writing "universal" poems? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 2. Research the significance of Spanish settings and history for Cernuda's poetry. Why do you think Cernuda was so drawn to the traditions of a culture from which he felt deeply alienated? Support your thesis with detailed analyses of two to five poems.
- 3. Consider *Desolation of the Chimera* as a capstone to Cernuda's career. Does this seem like an intentionally "final" book? Why or why not?
- 4. Read the poem "Otras ruinas" alongside two other modern poems about cities (by poets other than

Cernuda—perhaps Octavio Paz or Charles Baudelaire). Compare and contrast "Otras ruinas" with the other two poems you have chosen, considering the poets' differing attitudes toward time, the city, and modernity.

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Miguel de Cervantes

BORN: 1547, Alcalá de Henares, Spain

DIED: 1616, Madrid, Spain NATIONALITY: Spanish

GENRE: Fiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Don Quixote (1605–1615)

Overview

Miguel de Cervantes had an enormous impact on the development of modern fiction. His novel *Don Quixote* represents the first extended prose narrative in European literature in which characters and events are depicted in



Miguel de Cervantes Cervantes, Saavedra Miguel de, engraving.

accord with modern realistic tradition. It is considered the original European novel, one from which all others, in some sense, are descended.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Family and Early Life Miguel de Cervantes was born on or about September 29, 1547, in Alcalá de Henares, near Madrid, Spain, to Rodrigo de Cervantes Saavedra and Leonor de Cortinas. His father was a pharmacist and surgeon, and the family traveled frequently as he looked for work. Cervantes went to school in Madrid, where he probably wrote his first known works, poems on the death of Spanish queen Isabel de Valois, which were published in 1569.

Soldier and Prisoner At that point, Cervantes had moved to Rome to serve as steward to Guilio Cardinal Acquaviva, a high-ranking clergyman. The following year, he enlisted with the Spanish army. In 1571, Cervantes fought in a naval battle off the coast of Greece. Although shot twice in the chest and once in his left hand—an injury that left him permanently crippled—Cervantes gloried in the victory for the rest of his life.

His military career ended in 1574 and was followed by royal commendations.

While returning from the Tunisian coast to Spain the following year, Cervantes and a group of fellow Spaniards were captured by Algerian pirates; for the next five years they remained imprisoned in North Africa. After four failed escape attempts organized by Cervantes and numerous setbacks to efforts on their behalf at home, the prisoners were finally ransomed, and the group returned to Spain as national heroes late in 1580.

Early Writing With a faltering Spanish economy, jobs were few and far between. The Spanish government spent vast sums on foreign wars and the flow of money from New World territories was being interrupted by enterprising British privateers who seized Spanish treasure ships in the name of Queen Elizabeth I of England. In hopes of fame as well as fortune, Cervantes began writing plays for the Spanish stage in the classical Greek tradition of Euripides and Aeschylus, though he focused on contemporary national concerns. It is believed that during the course of only a few years Cervantes wrote some thirty full-length plays, although only one was produced.

In 1585, he wrote his first pastoral romance, *Galatea* and married Catalina de Salazar y Palacios. The following year, he took a position as requisitioning supplies for the Spanish Armada, a fleet of ships assembled for a planned invasion of England. The Spanish Armada was dealt a crushing defeat by the British navy in the English Channel in 1588. Historians speculate that this costly defeat marked the end of Spain's power and influence in Europe. During the 1580s and 1590s, Cervantes found himself on the wrong side of the law for various reasons (debt, tax fraud, even suspected murder), and was imprisoned and released several times.

Don Quixote Throughout this period, he had continued to write both well-received poetry and unsuccessful plays. He began to write El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha (Don Quixote) in order to capitalize on the public's overwhelming interest in chivalric romances by writing a lively, salable parody of the genre. Part 1 was published in 1605 to popular and critical praise and was an immediate best seller. Part 2 (1615) was equally popular. The chivalric romances Cervantes poked fun at were tales of knights and ladies told by traveling storytellers of the earlier Middle Ages. By Cervantes's day, the idea of a gallant knight setting off on a quest was considered an entertaining notion of a bygone era.

Cervantes published a few more tales after *Don Quix*ote, and was finishing a new novel when he died in 1616.

Works in Literary Context

The First Modern Novel Don Quixote is widely considered the first modern novel. The term "novel' in this case means a long work of fiction written in prose featuring

realistic characters and settings. *Don Quixote* was, in fact, a self-conscious break from the popular prose genre of the time, the "romance," which featured heroic characters and mythic settings. Cervantes used his work to poke fun at the popularity of these romances.

Don Quixote has had a vast influence on the development of the modern novel. It remains a watershed work of art that exerted undeniable impact on the fiction of Henry Fielding, French writer Alain Rene Le Sage, Scottish writer Tobias Smollett, and other early novelists. The novel also anticipated—through its treatment of the comic outsider, satire of social convention, and exploration of the human psyche—countless later fictional masterpieces.

Illusion and Reality Although the structural components in this long novel are numerous, perhaps most important is its novel-within-a-novel scheme. Cervantes's representation and examination of the fine line between real and imagined worlds, between sanity and insanity, between the world of the creative artist and the actual world, becomes the book's central theme.

Works in Critical Context

The general trend in criticism has been overwhelmingly favorable toward *Don Quixote*. From the seventeenth century onward, the work has progressively been regarded as more than a comic entertainment. Ultimately, critics have viewed the novel as an epic masterpiece in which the abnormal psyche of the human mind, the friendship between individuals, and the struggle to create lasting art out of ordinary existence are dramatized in modern language and form. As ardent as the proponents of the work are, however, it has had prominent detractors. English Romantic poet Lord Byron, for example, claimed that Cervantes was responsible for extinguishing the chivalric spirit in Europe through his parodies of chivalric encounters, a charge repeated by English novelist Ford Madox Ford in 1938.

Critics often claim that, had Cervantes not written *Don Quixote*, he would undoubtedly be an obscure writer in world literature today. What largely elevates the novel to greatness, according to many scholars, is the close and complex bond that develops between the two characters, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Don Quixote is commonly understood as a composite of the tragic idealist, the unbridled imaginative genius; Sancho, on the other hand, is the ardent skeptic, the simple-minded advocate of rationality.

Responses to Literature

1. Think about Don Quixote as the idealistic genius and Sancho Panza as the rational skeptic. Write an informal essay in which you describe the character you are more like. Do you have a close friend who is the opposite type?

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cervantes's famous contemporaries include:

Tycho Brahe (1546–1601): Danish nobleman, astrologer, and alchemist whose observations of planetary and stellar positions enabled the discovery of the laws of planetary motion.

William Byrd (c. 1543–1623): English Renaissance composer well known for his liturgical music and works for harpsichord.

Caravaggio (1571–1610): Italian Baroque artist whose use of naturalism was radical for his time.

Philip II of Spain (1527–1598): King of Spain, Naples, Portugal, and Chile, as well as husband of Queen Mary I of England. He led the Spanish Empire to become a global power through expansion and exploration.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616): An English poet and dramatist considered by many to be the greatest English-language writer, he died on the same date as Cervantes.

- 2. Don Quixote was adapted for stage as the musical Man of La Mancha, and its 1965 Broadway production garnered numerous awards. The musical was adapted for film in 1972. Read the novel, then watch the film version. Bearing in mind that Cervantes wrote Don Quixote to satirize popular chivalric romances, what do you make of the characterization of Don Quixote in the film? What aspects of Don Quixote does the film highlight? Why do you think this version of Don Quixote would appeal to modern viewers?
- 3. Harper Lee wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*, considered a classic of American literature, but she has published nothing since. Cervantes's reputation arguably rests on one novel as well. Do you think someone should be considered a "classic" writer for just one work, or should a reputation be based on multiple works of high quality? Write an essay arguing your point of view, being sure to use specific reasons.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* is noted for its humor, its social satire, and its psychological analysis. Here are some other works with similar traits:

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876), a novel by Mark Twain. An enterprising Southern boy rises to wealth and high society through a series of unlikely adventures.

A Confederacy of Dunces (1980), a novel by John Kennedy Toole. Awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, this novel follows Ignatius Reilly, a thirty-year-old man who still lives with his mother, as he seeks a job in 1960s New Orleans.

The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (1749), a novel by Henry Fielding. This comic classic chronicles the adventures and misadventures of a well-intentioned but unwise orphan, Tom Jones, after he is banished from his guardian's estate.

The Idiot (1868), a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Prince Myshkin embodies innocence, but when he is caught up with a rich merchant's son obsessed with a woman, tragedy ensues.

Madame Bovary (1857), a novel by Gustave Flaubert. Emma Bovary's romantic imagination and longing for an aristocratic life lead to adultery and her downfall.

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Maimé Césaire

BORN: 1913, Basse-Pointe, Martinique, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Drama, poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Return to My Native Land (1942) And the Dogs Were Silent (1956) The Tragedy of King Christophe (1963)

A Season in the Congo (1966)

A Tempest, Based on Shakespeare's The Tempest— Adaptation for a Black Theatre (1969)

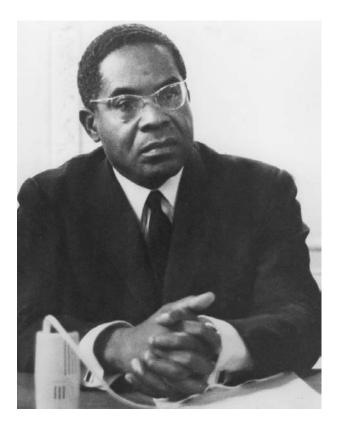
Overview

Martinican author Aimé Césaire is not only responsible for *Return to My Native Land* (1942), a widely acknowledged masterpiece documenting the twentieth-century colonial condition, but he is also an accomplished playwright. Like his poetry and polemical essays, his plays explore the paradox of black identity under French colonial rule. Césaire's shift to drama in the late 1950s and 1960s allowed him to integrate the modernist and surrealist techniques of his poetry and the polemics of his prose.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Aptitude, Early Ambition Aimé Césaire was born in Basse-Pointe, in the north of the island of Martinique. He was the second of the six children of Fernand Césaire, a minor government official, and his wife, Eléonore, a seamstress. Although the family was poor, Césaire received a good education and showed early aptitude for studies. He first attended the Lycée Schoelcher in Fort-de-France, the capital of Martinique, and then he received a scholarship to attend the prestigious Lycée Louis le Grand in Paris. There he met a Senegalese student, the future poet and African politician Léopold Senghor. In 1934 Césaire, with Senghor and Guyanan poet Léon Damas, founded the student journal Black Student. This group of black Francophone intellectuals also developed the concept of "Negritude," the embrace of blackness and Africanness as a counter to a legacy of colonial self-hatred.

In 1935 Césaire entered the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. During this time he traveled to Dalmatia and began work on his *Return to My Native Land*. He eventually passed the *agrégation des lettres*, the national competitive examination that leads to a career in teaching. In 1937 he married fellow Martinican student Suzanne Rossi. Their son, Jacques, the first of Césaire's four sons and two daughters, was born in 1938. In 1939 Césaire and Suzanne returned to Martinique to take up teaching positions at Lycée Schoelcher. In 1939 Césaire



Aimé Césaire Césaire, Aimé, photograph. AP Images.

published his first version of *Return to My Native Land*. The long autobiographical poem has since become one of the best-known French poems of the twentieth century.

Active Anticolonialism Césaire and his wife returned to the Caribbean as World War II began. Although Martinique was far removed from Europe, as a French territory it suffered economically from a German blockade, then later from censorship imposed by a representative of the Vichy government—the interim French regime that cooperated with Nazi Germany in order to prevent total German occupation of France. Césaire became increasingly critical of the Vichy government and established himself as a political voice in Martinique. In 1941 he and Suzanne founded the anticolonialist journal Tropics to promote Martinican culture; he was able to publish the journal in spite of the censors. That year Césaire received a visit from the founder of surrealism, André Breton, who had read Césaire's poetry and crossed the Atlantic to try to convince him to join his movement. Under the influence of surrealism, Césaire wrote his second collection of poetry, Miraculous Arms (1946), and later Sun Cut Throat (1948).

French Communism Césaire became active in regional politics and was elected mayor of Fort-de-France and deputy to the Constituent National Assembly on the French Communist Party ticket in 1945. He then suc-

cessfully fought to have Martinique and Guadeloupe recognized as overseas departments of France, which, as scholar Janis Pallister explains, the Communists believed would give the islands greater power within the political system. Dividing his time between Paris and Martinique, in 1947 he became cofounder of another journal, *African Presence*, which published the works of black Francophone writers.

Politics and Poetry During the 1950s and 1960s, Césaire remained active in both politics and literature. He turned his attention to the African diaspora—the spread of African peoples throughout the New World due to the slave trade—in his poetry collection Lost Body (1950) and wrote several important political essays, including "Discourse on Colonialism" (1950) and "Letter to Maurice Thorez" (1956), the latter of which explains his break with the Communist Party after the Soviet invasion of Hungary. In 1957 he founded the Martinique Progressive Party, and in 1959 he participated in the Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Rome. While maintaining his duties as the elected deputy from Martinique to the French National Assembly in Paris, he wrote two collections of poetry on Africa and the slave experience, Iron Chains (1960) and Cadastre (1961).

Leaving Communism, Entering Theater The year that Césaire left the Communist Party coincides with his earliest experiment in drama, And the Dogs Were Silent (1956). He had turned to theater in an effort to make his literary themes more accessible. The play is adapted from a long poem of the same title that appeared at the end of Miraculous Arms, and clearly marks Césaire's transition from poetry to theater. Described by Césaire as a "lyric oratorio," according to scholar Clive Davis, the play features the surrealism of his poetry and is difficult to stage. It was aired as a radio drama in France, but unlike later plays, has not enjoyed revivals. Nevertheless, it was an important precursor to Césaire's later theatrical works.

Although And the Dogs Were Silent is a political play, its commentary remains largely on the level of allegory and is deliberately obscure. In contrast, Césaire's next dramatic efforts, the plays he calls his "political triptych," comment more directly on specific historical situations of the 1950s and 1960s, especially in the context of postcolonial nationhood, leadership, and identity. The first of these plays, The Tragedy of King Christophe (1963) is also the first of Césaire's plays to be written expressly for the theater. It was directed by the avant-gardist Jean-Marie Serreau, who, as Davis reports, "master-minded the première production at the Salzburg festival" in 1964 "and subsequently took it to the Théâtre de l'Odéon in Paris." Césaire's relationships with French left-wing intellectuals and artists Michel Leiris and Pablo Picasso helped the play circumvent bureaucratic obstacles, and it was a huge success.

In *The Tragedy of King Christophe* Césaire provides an ironic commentary on postcolonial leadership, beginning a commentary that he develops further in *A Season*

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Césaire's famous contemporaries include:

Édouard Glissant (1928–): Martinican writer who worked to help establish a unique Caribbean identity for people of African descent.

Józef Garliński (1913–2005): Polish historian, he was known for his popular books on World War II, including such best sellers as *Fighting Auschwitz* (1974).

Frantz Fanon (1925–1961): Martinican psychiatrist and author known for his studies of the effects of colonialism.

Langston Hughes (1902–1967): American poet who was one of the key figures in the Harlem Renaissance; he has been recognized as America's favorite poet in a survey by the Academy of American Poets.

Fannie Lou Hamer (1917–1977): American civil rights leader, she was an influential voting rights activist who was instrumental as a facilitator of Mississippi's Freedom Summer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and later as the Vice-Chairperson of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Mahalia Jackson (1912–1972): American gospel singer, she was regarded the best of the genre and considered the Queen of Gospel.

in the Congo (1966). This second play of Césaire's political triptych recounts the rise, fall, and assassination of Congolese political leader Patrice Lumumba and the Congo's declaration of independence from Belgian colonial rule. The play's topical nature—including the Congo's rise to independence as Zaire under the leadership of Lumumba, and its neocolonial subjection under an ambitious but corrupt leader—affected its production history: As Davis reports, the Belgian authorities tried to suppress the production of the play, which was first staged in Brussels. Césaire's supporters among the intellectuals of Paris intervened and, according to Davis, "succeeded in circumventing these obstacles." When the play was staged in Paris under the direction of Serreau, Davis claims that it "provoked unease" among the "educated Zairian population."

Celebrated Author and Activist After 1970 Césaire published the third play of the political triptych, another volume of poetry, *I, Laminary* (1982), and several more political and historical essays. In 1982 French president François Mitterrand appointed him president of the regional council for the French Overseas Departments, a position that allowed him to encourage the economic and cultural development of his native Marti-

nique. In 1993 he retired from national political life in Paris to Fort-de-France, Martinique, which acknowledged the island's debt to a great champion of its liberation and culture with a municipal celebration of his ninetieth birthday in 2003.

Works in Literary Context

Embracing African Culture and Rejecting Colonialism Césaire's writing consistently investigates the personal and public themes of black social and political culture. His poetry and plays work to honor the black race and defend its solidarity. In his autobiographical poem, Return to My Native Land, Césaire rejects European culture, accepting his African and Caribbean roots. Juxtaposing historical data, descriptions of nature, and dream imagery, he praises the contributions of the black race to world civilization. In what he describes as his "triptych" of plays, The Tragedy of King Christophe 1963), A Season in the Congo (1965), and A Tempest (1969), Césaire again explores a series of related themes, especially the efforts of blacks-whether in Africa, the United States, or the Caribbean—to resist the powers of colonial domination.

His plays in particular oscillate between lyricism, realism, and allegory, manipulating the conventions of the theater to provide a general political commentary on racism, colonialism, and decolonization in the specific context of recurring themes: anger against colonial power; the painful memories of slavery and the middle passage; placing the West Indies within a global pan-African context; and the impossible situation of black political leadership in the age of decolonization. Hilary Okam of *Yale French Studies* further maintains that "it is clear from [Cesaire's] use of symbols and imagery, that despite years of alienation and acculturation he has continued to live in the concrete reality of his Negro-subjectivity."

Influences Locales, events, attitudes, writers, and writing helped shape Césaire's work. At the École Normale Supérieure in Paris Césaire began his lifelong study of American black writers, especially the Harlem Renaissance poets. With Senghor, Césaire read and discussed the ethnologist Leo Frobenius's History of African Culture (1933). With the 1941 visit from founding surrealist André Breton, Césaire not only developed a style influenced by surrealism but wrote essays such as "Poetry and Knowledge" (1945) espousing the surrealist principle of poetry as a means of liberating subconscious truth.

Works in Critical Context

Early criticism was appropriately directed at Césaire's poetry and on his personal investment as a black French anticolonialist in search of true identity. Hilary Okam of *Yale French Studies* contends that "Césaire's poetic idiosyncrasies, especially his search for and use of uncommon

vocabulary, are symptomatic of his own mental agony in the search for an exact definition of himself and, by extension, of his people and their common situation and destiny." A poetic work demonstrating this is his first and best-regarded *Return to My Native Land*:

Return to My Native Land (1942) The concerns found in Return to My Native Land ultimately transcend the personal or racial, addressing liberation and selfawareness in universal terms. Critic Judith Gleason calls the work "a masterpiece of cultural relevance, every bit as 'important' as [T. S. Eliot's] The Waste Land," and concludes that "its remarkable virtuosity will ensure its eloquence long after the struggle for human dignity has ceased to be viewed in racial terms." André Breton, writing in What Is Surrealism?, also sees larger issues at stake in the poem. "What, in my eyes, renders this protest invaluable," Breton states, "is that it continually transcends the anguish which for a black man is inseparable from the lot of blacks in modern society, and unites with the protest of every poet, artist and thinker worthy of the name...to embrace the entire intolerable though amendable condition created for man by this society."

Writing in the *CLA Journal*, Ruth J. S. Simmons concludes that although Césaire's poetry is personal, he speaks from a perspective shared by many other blacks. "Poetry has been for him," Simmons explains, "an important vehicle of personal growth and self-revelation, [but] it has also been an important expression of the will and personality of a people....[It is] impossible to consider the work of Césaire outside of the context of the poet's personal vision and definition of his art. He defines his past as African, his present as Antillean and his condition as one of having been exploited....To remove Césaire from this context is to ignore what he was and still is as a man and as a poet."

Césaire's plays have garnered as much international acclaim as his poetry. Serge Gavronsky stated in *New York Times Book Review* that "in the [1960s, Césaire] was...the leading black dramatist writing in French." Clive Wake, critic for the *Times Literary Supplement*, remarked that Césaire's plays have "greatly widened [his] audience and perhaps tempted them to read the poetry." Again touching upon political themes from the history of a postcolonial world, one such play of interest is *A Tembest*:

A Tempest, Based on Shakespeare's The Tempest—Adaptation for a Black Theatre (1969) The title page of A Tempest announces its revisionary relationship with William Shakespeare's play The Tempest. The title also advertises the overturning of what Janis Pallister calls the "master-slave dynamic" of that play: Césaire keeps his promise and revises, racializes, and politicizes the relationships Shakespeare creates among Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban. His use of the phrase "black theater" is significant in its claim for a black transnational identity. A Tempest makes reference to the postcolonial relations

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also succeeded in exploring identity in the context of political oppression and/or racism:

The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia (1992), a nonfiction work by Peter Hopkirk. This survey closely considers the "great game" played between czarist Russia and Victorian England for supremacy in central Asia

Midnight's Children (1981), a novel by Salman Rushdie. The focused story of an Indian protagonist, born with 1,001 others on August 15, 1947, (India's Independence Day) amid magic realism and political turmoil. Things Fall Apart (1959), a novel by Chinua Achebe. This novel depicts the story of colonialism and its invasive and destructive impact on Nigerian tribal culture. This Earth of Mankind (1991), a novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Indonesian political dissident and novelist Toer offers an intriguing story of love and colonialism in turn-of-the-century Java.

of the French Caribbean and the *métropole*, the postcolonial struggles of Africa, and the struggles of the Black Power and civil rights movements in the United States.

A scholar for *International Dictionary of Theatre* summarizes the larger essence of Césaire's dramatic works:

Contemporaneity is one of the great strengths of Césaire's theatre. But the contemporary is ephemeral. Even the traumas of decolonization will fade from the collective memory, if they have not already done so. Those of Césaire's plays which deal exclusively with this period of history will, perhaps, have less appeal for a broad public, despite the fact that they are accessible and attractive as theatre. A Tempest, which addresses the broader and more enduring question of cultural relativity, may consequently prove to be Césaire's most durable play.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Césaire's poetry is a mix of modernism and surrealism. What surrealistic characteristics can you identify in his poems? Compare his first work, *Return to My Native Land*, with one of his follow-up works. Is there a difference in the surrealist characteristics between the two? Explain.
- One characteristic of Césaire's work involves the anger aimed at colonialism. Africans were frustrated with the inconsistencies, the clashing of ideals, the hypocrisies. Africans were unnerved by colonial efforts to assimilate them. As Césaire defined it, "We

- didn't know what Africa was. Europeans despised everything about Africa, and in France people spoke of a civilized world and a barbarian world. The barbarian world was Africa.... Therefore, the best thing one could do with an African was to assimilate him: the idea was to turn him into a Frenchman with black skin." Research colonialist assimilation of Africans. What areas of African life-education, religion, home and family—were impacted? How was African identity affected? What was nationalism? What were the motives behind assimilation efforts? Was conversion successful? What is Africa's place in the world today? If a group chooses to survey colonialism, each individual might take on a different aspect of colonialism and report back in order to better understand the history and concepts of colonialism.
- 3. For Native Americans from the 1900s through the 1960s involved coercive assimilation by the U.S. government. Many Native Americans experienced identity crises "due to the differences between cultures, values, and expectations of their tribal traditions and those of mainstream American social and educational systems," says scholar Michael Tlanusta Garret. For Africans, colonialism had a similar dreadful effect. In a group effort, research the two cultures and the government movements that changed them. How are they similar? What did the white culture want from them? What life changes did each have in common? How did each respond to the invasion of governments? Who resisted? Who protested?

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■ Mary Challans

See Mary Renault

■ George Chapman

BORN: c. 1559, Hitchin, Hertfordshire,

England

DIED: 1634, London
NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry, drama, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Blind Beggar of Alexandria (1596)

All Fools (1605)
Eastward Ho (1605)

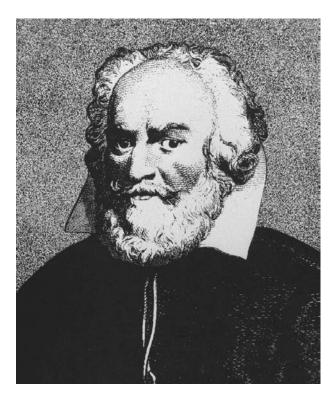
Bussy D'Ambois (1607)

Overview

Dramatist, poet, and distinguished translator, George Chapman embodied the Renaissance ideal of the sophisticated man of letters capable of writing competently in a wide range of genres. He was as much at ease writing dramatic poetry as he was writing farcical comedies or philosophical tragedies. Chapman's dramas achieved moderate success in his lifetime, though they are now rarely performed. Many critics consider his translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* his most important achievement.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Years and Military Service Chapman's life is not well documented. He was born at Hitchin in Hertfordshire, England, around the year 1559, the second son of Thomas Chapman and Joan Nodes, the daughter of a



George Chapman Chapman, George, photograph.

royal huntsman at the court of Henry VIII. Very little is known about Chapman's early education, though it is presumed he attended the grammar school at Hitchin. He attended Oxford beginning in 1574, where he is said to have excelled in Greek and Latin. Following his time at Oxford, Chapman entered into the service of a prominent nobleman, Sir Ralph Sadler, from 1583 to 1585. He subsequently served with the military expedition of Sir Francis Vere in the United Provinces, which were then engaged in the Eighty Years War.

"School of Night" Chapman returned to England in 1594, established residence in London, and published his first work, The Shadow of Night: Containing Two Poeticall Hymnes. Around this time, Chapman entered Sir Walter Raleigh's circle, a literary group devoted to scientific and philosophical speculation that occasionally dabbled in the occult. Termed "The School of Night" by William Shakespeare for their esoteric ideas, the circle's influence, especially its metaphysical orientation, is evident in Chapman's writings of the 1590s, including both the poetry collection Ovid's Banquet of Sence and his completion of Christopher Marlowe's Hero and Leander.

Professional Success, Financial Hardship Toward the end of the 1590s, Chapman debuted as a dramatist with a pair of comedies, *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* and *A Humorous Day's Mirth*, written for the Lord Admiral's Men, a major theatrical company in London. Other comedies followed, written for similar private theatrical com-

panies. By the close of the Elizabethan period, Chapman was widely recognized as a leading dramatist and poet, yet the meager income from the production of his plays forced him to live in poverty. Increasingly strained circumstances led to desperate solutions: In 1599, Chapman relinquished his claim to the family estate for a small cash settlement. The following year, Chapman was imprisoned for debt, the unwitting victim of a fraudulent moneylender.

Return to Prison With the accession of James I in 1603, Chapman's fortune suddenly changed when he was given a position in the household of Prince Henry. At the time, many artists survived by securing funding from a wealthy patron, a sponsor of their work who usually received dedications in the creator's work as well as increased social standing for helping to bring great art into being. With Prince Henry as his patron, Chapman continued composing dramas, including his last major comedy, Eastward Ho, written in collaboration with Ben Jonson and John Marston. The play's sarcastic political insults against policies favored by James I resulted in swift imprisonment for Chapman and Jonson, though both were soon released. Afterward, Chapman turned to writing tragedy. His best-known works from this period are Bussy D'Ambois and the two-part The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron.

Without a Patron Chapman's career is also notable for his ambitious plan to translate into modern English the classical Greek works of Homer. His translation of the first twelve books of the Iliad appeared in 1609, prefaced by a dedication to Prince Henry, who had endorsed the work with a promise of three hundred pounds and a pension. However, when the young prince died suddenly in 1612, the prince's father failed to fulfill Henry's promise to Chapman. A similar fate befell Chapman's hope in Robert Carr, later Earl of Somerset, whose career at court was effectively terminated due to a series of marital scandals. In effect, Chapman remained without a patron for his entire literary career, the financial and professional consequences of which were disastrous. He completed a translation of Homer's poetry and a pair of classical tragedies around 1615 that were never performed during his lifetime. By 1624, Chapman's last years were spent in relative obscurity. Nonetheless, when he died on May 12, 1634, Chapman was honored by the elite, including the fashionable architect Inigo Jones, who constructed his funeral monument.

Works in Literary Context

Chapman's approach to literature was similar to that of his famous contemporary, Ben Jonson. Like Jonson, Chapman was strongly influenced by the artistic theories of Italian Renaissance writers, who held that the works of classical antiquity defined true artistic principles. However, while Jonson was specifically concerned with matters of literary style, Chapman was more interested in theoretical

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Chapman's famous contemporaries include:

Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616): Spanish author of Don Quixote, often cited as the first novel ever written.

Ben Jonson (1572–1637): English dramatist and poet, Jonson is best known for his play The Alchemist.

Ishida Mitsunari (1560–1600): This famous samurai led the Western Army during the Battle of Sekigahara.

Galileo Galilei (1564–1642): Galilei was an Italian astronomer who championed Copernicus's heliocentric theory—the belief that the planets of the solar system revolve around the sun—despite its unpopularity at the time.

Michel de Montaigne (1533–92): This French author pioneered the essay as an art form.

Sacharias Jansen (c. 1585–c. 1632): Jansen was a Dutch spectacle-maker who was one of two people likely to have invented the telescope.

and philosophical problems. The Neoplatonic theories of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, which said that artistic endeavors should aim to represent an ideal realm of truth, formed the basis of Chapman's poetics. The Stoic philosophy enunciated in the works of Seneca and Epictetus also influenced Chapman, particularly with regard to his tragic vision.

Ovid's Influence Like most writers of the English Renaissance, Chapman recognized narrative poetry as an important genre of classical literature and imitated such Latin poets as Ovid. His first poem, The Shadow of Night, consists of two books addressed to the figure of Night and the pagan goddess of the Moon, Cynthia. The Shadow of Night is written in the form of a complex allegory, exploring different levels of meaning—philosophical, political, and poetic—in an attempt to rationalize man's condition on earth. Perhaps Chapman's most highly regarded poem, Ovid's Banquet of Sence depicts Ovid's encounter with Julia, the daughter of the Roman emperor Augustus, who inspires him to write The Art of Love.

Chapman's next major work, his completion of Christopher Marlowe's first two books of *Hero and Leander*, is viewed by most critics as an austere corrective to Marlowe's sensual imagery. In the final lines of *Hero and Leander*, Chapman writes again from an allegorical perspective about the meaning of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Nonetheless, some critics link Chapman's poetic canon to seventeenth-century Metaphysical poetry because of his use of dense imagery to illuminate philosophical questions. Others maintain that his narrative poems were

intended as ironic commentary on the philosophical dilemmas posed by poets during the Augustan Age in Rome.

Low Comedy Chapman's career as a dramatist was divided fairly evenly between comedy and tragedy, with his early years largely devoted to comedies patterned after classical Roman models by Plautus and Terence. Chapman's first comedy, The Blind Beggar of Alexandria, is specifically modeled on the low comic theater of Plautus. It is an irreverent sexual farce wherein the title character succeeds in seducing a series of women through roleplaying and manipulation. Certain critics consider the play the first example of the "Comedy of Humours," a type of comedy traditionally attributed to Ben Jonson. Also considered an example of low comedy, A Humorous Day's Mirth features a plot of great complexity that revolves around the clever romantic intrigues of a courtier named Lemot. All Fools, an adaptation of Terence's Heauton Timoroumenos, is similarly a romantic farce focusing on the rituals of courtship and marriage. Eastward Ho is perhaps Chapman's best-known dramatic achievement. Produced in 1604 and intended to capitalize on the success of Thomas Dekker and John Webster's Westward Ho, the play explores the social milieu of London's middle class and is considered an excellent example of the city-comedy genre. Chapman's last noncollaborative comedy, The Gentleman Usher, is cited by many commentators as his finest work in that genre.

Legacy While the plays and poetry of Chapman have largely fallen out of favor, his status as a true Renaissance man marks him as an inspirational figure in the vein of Leonardo da Vinci. Indeed, it was Chapman's diverse interests—from philosophy to poetry to drama to history—that eventually led to his translating the works of Homer. It is in this role, much more than in his prodigious output as dramatist and poet, that Chapman influenced later generations, particularly the Romantic poets, especially John Keats, who immortalized Chapman's work in the well-known sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer."

Works in Critical Context

Overall, the verdict on Chapman's dramatic work is varied. While many critics note Chapman's competence in plot and characterization, as well as his philosophical depth, others disparage his style as obtuse and overly elaborate. While Chapman is frequently praised as an adept technician, his inability to entertain has been criticized just as often. Referred to by many as genius, the works that have received the most attention are Chapman's translations.

Chapman as Dramatist Critics agree that Chapman's finest dramatic achievement was in tragedy. In his best-regarded works, he turned to French history for appropriate subjects. His first and most important tragedy, Bussy D'Ambois, is based on the life of Louis de Clermont d'Amboise, Seigneur de Bussy, a notorious duelist and

adventurer at the court of Henry III. Bussy is cast as a classical hero, echoing Hercules, Prometheus, and other mythical archetypes. Recently, critics have explored the relation of Bussy to the title hero of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, arguing that both characters personify the Herculean hero type admired by the Italian Humanists. Chapman wrote a sequel, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, considered a far weaker play. The work is completely imaginary; none of the characters and events relates to French history as in the original. The play's indecisive protagonist, Bussy's avenging brother Clermont, is generally assumed to be patterned after Shakespeare's Hamlet.

The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron deals with the intrigues and eventual execution of a prominent courtier serving Henry IV. An early performance in 1608 aroused the wrath of the French ambassador, who ordered the arrest of three actors because of a scandalous scene between the king's wife and his mistress. The play was so heavily censored by government authorities that the 1625 reprint bore little resemblance to the original. Chapman's final tragedies, Caesar and Pompey and The Tragedy of Chabot, Admiral of France, further elaborate on the theme of the stoic hero, but they have received less critical attention.

Chapman the Translator Chapman's translations of Homer's epic poetry have received significant critical attention, not only during his own lifetime, but also during the Romantic period in particular. The degree to which his translations successfully communicate Homer's language and meaning is now widely disputed because of Chapman's limited knowledge of classical Greek and his free interpretation of Homer's original text. Proponents of Chapman's translations suggest that their value must be measured by their ability to capture the spirit of the original, which was, without question, one of Chapman's greatest strengths. Scholars argue that Chapman's achievement as a translator must be assessed in light of his own poetic theories. As Raymond B. Waddington puts it, Chapman "regarded his job as translation, making the universal values of Homer comprehensible and therefore relevant to his own time and culture." In that sense, the popularity of his translations attests to their success, both during his lifetime and more than two hundred years after his death.

Responses to Literature

1. As noted above, Chapman's translations of Homer have been defended because they catch the spirit of the original text in the English of Chapman's time. Imagine you have written a novel that is to be translated into another language five hundred years from now. Would you rather the translator "get the spirit" of your novel or that the translator faithfully translate each and every word?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Chapman adapted the stories of past masters for contemporary audiences. This spirit of recasting familiar classics in contemporary settings is common throughout the history of literature, art, and film. Here are a few more works that attempt to tell familiar stories to new audiences:

- Clueless (1995), a film directed by Amy Heckerling. This film attempts to update Jane Austen's 1816 novel *Emma* about a matchmaking debutante and all the problems her meddling causes.
- A Thousand Acres (1991), a novel by Jane Smiley. A retelling of Shakespeare's King Lear, this novel takes place on a farm in lowa in the twentieth century rather than on the windswept plains of twelfth-century England.
- O, Brother, Where Art Thou? (2000), a film directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. Homer's Odyssey is changed into a comedy about three prison escapees in Mississippi during the Great Depression who encounter modern representations of classic Homeric characters, including the Sirens and a Cyclops, on their way home.
- 2. Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston were imprisoned for their play *Eastward Ho*. Do you think Chapman and the others had any idea they would provoke such an extreme reaction? What other artists have been imprisoned because of their work? Do you think controversial writers know ahead of time that they will be punished in some way for their art? Make a list of at least five issues of today that cause strong, sometimes violent, reactions from people. Beside each issue, include a brief explanation of why you think people have such strong reactions to it. (Think about animal-rights rallies or abortion protests.)
- 3. Read Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois*. A number of Chapman's dramas have been described as "overly elaborate," in the sense that the text is unnecessarily complex. Based on your reading of *Bussy D'Ambois*, do you think the plot is "overly elaborate?" Support your response with examples from the play.

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René Char

BORN: 1907, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, Vaucluse,

France

DIED: 1988, Paris, France
NATIONALITY: French
GENRE: Poetry, prose-poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Furor and Mystery (1948)

Search for the Base and the Summit (1955)

Overview

During his lifetime René Char was regarded by many as France's greatest living poet. Although his early association with the surrealists liberated his imagination and colored his imagery, Char's poetry also reflects the rusticity of life in the countryside of his native Provence. His experiences during World War II profoundly affected his poetry and led him to reflect on enduring human values. In addition to "anecdotal," Char's poetry has been labeled "hermetic," for it often suggests the poet as prophet and poetry as a kind of religion. His work has been illustrated by such notable contemporaries as Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso and set to music by Pierre Boulez. Albert Camus once called Char "a poet of all time who speaks for our time in particular."

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Childhood in the Hill Country of France René-Émile Char was born in the French town of L'Islesur-la-Sorgue, in the department (province) of the Vaucluse, on June 14, 1907. His poetry does celebrate sites outside his native region—such as Autun, Lascaux, and Alsace—and occasionally these become major symbols of creativity, love, or war, but the hill country of southeast-



René Char Jean-Regis Roustan / Roger Viollet / Getty Images

ern France dominates his poetic topography. Char is by no means a regionalist poet, however: he generally uses his native locale to stage epic struggles of justice versus injustice, in which the individual resists a repressive, conformist society. One of his major symbols, Mont Ventoux, is linked directly to Italian Renaissance poet Petrarch, and his portrayals of the southern countryside seek always the universal within the particular.

Char was the youngest of four children born to Joseph-Émile Char, businessman and town mayor, and his second wife, Marie-Thérèse Rouget Char. Émile Char's first marriage had been to Marie-Thérèse's older sister Julia, who died of tuberculosis after barely a year of marriage. Char plays on this endogamy in poems such as "Jacquemard et Julia," in the collection *Fureur et mystère* (*Furor and Mystery*, 1948), where the first marriage stands in idyllic counterpoint to the poet's own tense relationship with his mother. During Char's childhood, his family lived in the Névons, a large house surrounded by a park.

A Fatherless Soldier Char's father died on January 15, 1918. This event had a profound effect on the boy, who was not yet eleven, and many poems—such as "Jouvence des

Névons" ("Youth at the Névons"), from Les Matinaux (1950; translated as The Dawn Breakers, 1992)—bear witness to Char's subsequent sense of dispossession and existential solitude. Such feelings characterize a significant portion of his poetry, though they temper rather than overwhelm his basic optimism. As the critic Christine Dupouy notes in her 1987 monograph on Char, the family house and the extensive park surrounding it galvanized Char's poetic and psychological energies: the property symbolized the beauty of nature in his father's former realm and by contrast underscored the poet's rebellion against maternal authority. Shortly after his father's death, Char became a student at the lycée of Avignon but never completed the baccalauréat, a prestigious diploma that crowns secondary studies in France. Instead, in 1925 he enrolled in a business school at Marseilles and in 1926 took a job in Cavaillon, a few kilometers south of L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue. From 1927 to 1928 he did his military service in an artillery unit at Nîmes and published his first book of verse, Les Cloches sur le coeur (Bells on the Heart, 1928), most copies of which he later destroyed. This work is the only book published under his given name of René-Émile Char.

Char fought on the side of the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War and organized a resistance unit against the Nazi-controlled Vichy regime in France at Céreste during World War II. Although he continued writing, he did not publish during the German and Italian occupation of France, being fully engaged with the resistance movement—with duties ranging from organizing Allied parachute drops in the Alps to helping organize the Allied invasion of Provence from Algeria. After the war, he was lionized by a France eager to forget its complicity in Nazi atrocities, and he alternated between living in Paris and Provence. He continued writing poetry until his death of heart failure in 1988.

Works in Literary Context

Polarity and Wisdom Char's philosophical master was the philosopher Heraclitus, whom he described as a "vision of a solar eagle" who embraced opposites. Char believed that "the poem is always married to someone," and the technique of his poetry can be expressed in the Heraclitean saying, "The Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither expresses nor conceals, but indicates." "I am torn," Char explained, "by all the fragments there are." Yet his mind could "polarize the most neutral objects," writes Gabriel Bounoure. And Camus noted Char's right to "lay claim to the tragic optimism of pre-Socratic Greece. From Empedocles to Nietzsche, a secret had been passed on from summit to summit, an austere and rare tradition which Char has revived after prolonged eclipse.... What he has called 'Wisdom, her eyes filled with tears,' is brought to life again, on the very heights of our disasters."

Poetry as Warfare Seuls demeurent and Feuillets d'Hypnos reflect his wartime experiences of violence, killing, and fear. For instance, the poem "L'Extravagant"

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Char's famous contemporaries include:

Leon Trotsky (1879–1940): A Ukrainian-born Marxist, Trotsky was one of the leaders of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia and developed a school of Marxist thought deeply opposed to the totalitarian corruption of communism espoused and practiced by Stalin in the Soviet Union.

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989): The surrealist painter par excellence, the Spanish-born Dalí was fond of highlighting his Arab lineage, claiming to be descended from the Moors who had occupied southern Spain for close to eight hundred years.

André Breton (1896–1966): A French poet who defined surrealism as "pure psychic automism" in the *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924, he collaborated with Char and others on significant early works.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Celebrated Argentine author, recognized around the world as one of the most important writers and thinkers to come out of Latin America in the twentieth century.

Richard Nixon (1913–1994): The thirty-seventh president of the United States, Nixon was the only American president to voluntarily step down from office; he resigned in disgrace and amid scandal in August 1974.

was inspired by an order, which Char had given as a guerrilla commander in Spain, to have two young men executed. The war years influenced his later poetry by tempering his attitude toward humanity with compassion and brotherhood, and by reinforcing his conception of poetry as a mode of guerrilla warfare and resistance.

Works in Critical Context

Char's poetry is widely read and highly regarded both in his native France and in other countries. Some critics have detected a tension between "separateness" and "communal presence" throughout his canon. Nancy Kline Piore notes that although Char was a "deeply private man," he "participated actively in two of the most important communal efforts of the century, Surrealism and the Resistance, and both have marked his work." There is some critical debate, however, as to how much the surrealist movement influenced his writing. Some critics believe that Char's broken syntax, striking imagery, unusual vocabulary, and deliberate defiance of the rules of logical coherence conspire to make his poetry unnecessarily difficult.

Blinding Light and Unbearable Darkness In 1952, France's most prominent novelist, Albert Camus, wrote, "I consider René Char to be our greatest living poet, and Fureur et Mystère to be the most astonishing

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Char's work is perhaps most strongly characterized by a sense of struggle—an awareness that all life is unresolved opposition that brings both uncertainty and delight. Here are some other works that celebrate conflict, not for the sake of conflict, but for the sake of life:

The Subtle Knife (1997), a novel by Philip Pullman. This fantasy tale draws on Keats's idea of negative capability in chronicling the interworld adventures of Lyra Silvertongue.

The Crying of Lot 49 (1966), a novel by Thomas Pynchon. Pynchon, one of the United States' premier postmodern fiction writers, provokes and confounds interpretation in this short novel, insisting that the unresolvable conflict of perspectives makes it more or less impossible for meaning to "truly" determine actions or ideas.

"Song of Myself" (1860), a poem by Walt Whitman. The American poet captures the idea of unresolved conflict in this epic poem, a part of *Leaves of Grass*, his life's work. He writes, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes."

Poetics (c. 335 BCE), a nonfiction work by Aristotle. Classical Greek philosophy, exemplified in Aristotle, saw the universe as an endless pattern of conflict, or *agon*, in which opposing forces struggled for dominance.

product of French poetry since *Les Illuminations* and *Alcools*." Gabriel Bounoure likewise responded strongly to Char's work: "I remember when I first read Char's poetry I was drawn by its evident greatness.... Char's universe is the kingdom of the open air."

Many of Char's poems are aphoristic—short, stabbing distillations of language for maximum meaning. Emile Snyder writes: "A poem by René Char is an act of violence within which serenity awaits the end of violence." The concentrated lucidity he attains is, in Char's own words "the wound closest to the sun." Camus remarked that this poetry "carries daytime and night on the same impulse...."

Responses to Literature

- 1. List and discuss two or three themes from Char's *Furor and Mystery*. How do "furor" and "mystery" pervade Char's treatment of these themes?
- 2. Compare the poetic vision of Char with those of Paul Éluard, André Breton, and one more surrealist poet of your choice. Using one or two poems by each (all from the same period), consider the ways in which Char both was and was not a good representative of the surrealist movement.

- 3. Char was one of a number of poets and fiction writers to participate in the Spanish Civil War, which was perhaps the most popular war of all time among intellectuals and artists—many of whom fought or served in the ambulance corps for the Republicans, the troops opposing the authoritarian dictator-to-be General Franco. Research the Spanish Civil War and consider what it was that drew Char and others to participate in this conflict. Discuss, in a thesis-driven essay, the significance of this war for the development of Char's poetic sensibilities and those of his generation of artists.
- 4. Consider two to three of Char's later poems alongside two to three of his earlier poems. What similarities and differences do you see in his treatment of conflict and opposition? Do you see his later approach to this theme as more of a continuation of his earlier approach, or more of a break from it? Support your thesis with careful analysis of specific poetic devices and themes.

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™ Thomas Chatterton

BORN: 1752, Bristol, England DIED: 1770, London, England

NATIONALITY: British
GENRE: Fiction, poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

"A Hunter of Oddities" (1770)

"Memoirs of a Sad Dog" (1770)



Thomas Chatterton Chatterton, Thomas, painting. The Library of Congress.

Alla: A Tragycal Enterlude (1777)
"Excelente Balade of Charitie" (1777)
Goddwyn: A Tragedie (1777)

Overview

Of all English poets, Thomas Chatterton seemed to his great Romantic successors to most typify a commitment to the life of the imagination. For a variety of reasons, which to a large extent relate to the state of letters in his time, he achieved the status of a myth. The victim of starvation and despair, his suspected suicide in a London garret at the age of eighteen enhanced his social and literary significance to an archetypal level.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up in a Household of Women Thomas Chatterton was born on November 10, 1752, in Bristol, England. He was the son of a schoolmaster, also named Thomas, a man of an eccentric disposition but with strong musical and poetic abilities and antiquarian interests. His mother, who was widowed four months before Chatterton's birth, kept the home running with her work as a needlewoman. Chatterton grew up in a household of women—his mother, sister, and paternal grandmother. At an early age, Chatterton was judged to be "stupid" due to his early inability to learn to read. However, at the

age of six, he became deeply interested in an illuminated manuscript at Saint Mary Redcliffe Church, after which he did little but read and demonstrate his precocity.

Saint Mary Redcliffe Church Chatterton's ancestors had been sextons of the Church of Saint Mary in the parish of Redcliff for generations. It was the Church of Saint Mary Redcliffe that became the young Chatterton's favorite place to spend time. Elsewhere, he was prone to outbursts of rage alternating with tearful episodes. The constant proximity of the old and beautiful church, however, with whose fabric his ancestors had been so closely connected, nurtured his extraordinary sensibility.

Solitary Brooding Yields First Publication at Age Eleven At the age of eight Chatterton was sent to Colston's charitable foundation, a Hospital School, where his education was geared to the vocational requirements of his community-commerce and law-rather than to encouraging the development of his imagination through classical training. Chatterton began to read voraciously. He frequently haunted local bookshops, and he was equally eager about writing. Chatterton collected all the remnants of parchment he could find and took them to a lumber room that he appropriated for his own use. There, his solitary brooding, combined with the discontents of his daily life, encouraged the young prodigy to express himself in writing. At the age of eleven, he had his first poetry published in the January 8, 1763, edition of Felix Farley's Bristol Journal.

Suffered Beatings for Poetry At the end of his schooling he was indentured to a local lawyer, John Lambert, as a scrivener, or copy clerk. Upon finding out that he wrote poetry in his spare time, his employer beat him and, tearing up what he had written, forbade him to continue. However, there were other like-minded young men with whom Chatterton gossiped and for whom he produced verse exercises of various kinds. Thomas Phillips, the usher at Colston's, had been regarded as a remarkable versifier, but Phillips died in 1769; Chatterton's three elegies to Phillips show he had been to some extent a fellow spirit.

Rowley Is Born Chatterton returned to the Church of Saint Mary Redcliff in Bristol for his greatest (and most talked-about) writing efforts. Using documentation he found there, he created fictions based upon the lives of people from the church's history. The church had been founded in the fifteenth century by William Canning, mayor of Bristol and a romantic figure of enormous wealth and property. Among Canning's contemporaries had been Thomas Rowley, at one time sheriff of Bristol. In his solitude, Chatterton wrote works that he attributed, upon submission for publication, to Rowley.

With his first successful submission to the local newspaper, Chatterton attracted the attention of William Barrett, a surgeon and local antiquary. Barrett's encyclopediastyle *History of Bristol* (1789) was to include much of Chatterton's "Rowley" material as genuine. Modern readers should keep in mind that the clear distinction between fact and fiction in written works only found its codification with the rise of the novel itself. Histories written prior to the emergence of the novel as a genre often included fanciful material. In this case, Chatterton cunningly offered material that would attract an antiquary and reinforced the forgery with sophisticated critique, also forged, to enhance its supposed authenticity. Not only was none of the Rowley poetry published as Chatterton's during Chatterton's lifetime, but his "friends" were among the most adamant after his death in asserting that the boy they had known could not possibly have written the Rowley poems.

Fooling Horace Walpole Chatterton became even more creative to convince his next patrons. The "Account of the De Berghams from the Norman Conquest to This Time" earned him a small sum of money, but his work was soon exposed as a hoax. Chatterton then targeted famous author Horace Walpole. What better ploy than to have Canning send Rowley to catalogue the paintings of the fifteenth century in a journey around Britain in order to whet Walpole's appetite for unknown artists? Walpole welcomed Chatterton's opening gambit, a piece titled "The Rise of Peyncteynge yn Englande, wroten bie T. Rowleie, 1469 for Mastre Canynge." Walpole gave courteous encouragement, offering to print them if they had not been printed before.

Chatterton not only sent poems but disclosed the truth of his own situation—that he was the son of a poor widow and wished to be released from his drudgery as an attorney's apprentice. The obviously modern tone of the specimens Walpole received (particularly of the pastoral poems) and his embarrassment at being tricked and consequently ridiculed made Walpole at first neglect to respond to Chatterton. He then made brusque dismissal of any hopes Chatterton might have had from this particular great man. After Chatterton's suspected suicide, Walpole was cast in the role of persecutor of the indigent and youthful genius.

One Final Hoax So ripe must the time have seemed for his new life to begin that Chatterton found a way to extricate himself from his apprenticeship. On April 14, 1769, he devised a last will and testament and specified memorials to be placed on the tombs of his ancestors and on his own. His scheme succeeded: the largely fictitious emotions were assumed to be authentic, and Lambert released him from his apprenticeship. Chatterton was free to go to London to make his fortune. He left Bristol on April 17 for the first and last time. He had already written to booksellers and publishers in London, and he visited them promptly on the evening of his arrival.

Writing Opportunities Change From then on, the pace of his life and the hectic qualities of his letter writing increased. He took lodgings with a relative in Shoreditch and there wrote glowing accounts of his fashionable

acquaintance and of his influence with London publishers. He had established connections with the editors of the Town and Country Magazine, the Middlesex Journal, and the Freeholder's Magazine. It is reported, however, that when the government clamped down on their activities and imprisoned the editor of the Freeholder's Magazine. Chatterton's market became constricted. Chatterton earned a little money from periodical stories such as "Letter of Maria Friendless" and "Memoirs of a Sad Dog," both published in Town and Country. About the time Chatterton moved from Shoreditch to the house of Mrs. Angel, a dress maker on Brooke Street, he must have written, or more likely improved, his "Excelente Balade of Charitie," the only poem of this period written in the Rowleian style. It was not accepted for publication by the Town and Country, which merely printed an acknowledgment of its receipt, having already accepted as much material as it could publish.

Mrs. Angel The sentiments of the rejected poem have long been supposed those of Chatterton himself as his fortunes sank even lower. He wrote to his old Bristol acquaintance William Barrett for support in gaining a position as a ship's surgeon, but, since Chatterton had no medical training, Barrett could only refuse. The last presents for home were sent with confident and affectionate letters to his mother and sister, the two women who remained the center of his emotional concern. He promised more gifts and future good fortune, but in fact he was being beset by the ironically named Mrs. Angel.

At this date, he was still hoping that Barrett might help him to the post of ship's surgeon. The near fifty percent increase in his rent is deduced to have been the final blow to his finances. "A Hunter of Oddities," published in September in *Town and Country*, includes an exchange in which a lodger asks his landlady what he may be given for dinner, and it concludes "Your score is now seven and thirty shillings; and I think it is time it should be cleared." Mrs. Angel told a neighbor that, knowing Chatterton had not eaten for two or three days, she begged him to take a meal with her on August 24, but that he refused. The same day he was reputed to have tried to beg a loaf from a baker he knew.

Suspected Suicide at Age Eighteen In the course of the night of August 24, 1770, Chatterton swallowed both opium and arsenic in water. The general conclusion was that the eighteen-year-old had committed suicide. A neighboring chemist, Mr. Cross, noted after Chatterton's death that he was using vitriol to cure himself of venereal disease. Scholars of late, however, are also considering the possibility that the arsenic (or the combination of opium and arsenic) accidentally killed him. At the time he died, Oxford scholar Dr. Thomas Fry had just started to inquire about the Rowley poems.

Works in Literary Context

In his reading, Chatterton encountered the Ossian fragments and epics of Scottish poet James Macphersonworks which had become the rage of the polite world in the 1760s. He also read Thomas Percy's works, where differences between ancient and modern ballads were discussed. Equally important, as scholar Bertrand Bronson has shown, was Elizabeth Cooper's *The Muses Library* (1737), a four-hundred-page account of such older English poets as Edward the Confessor, Samuel Daniel, William Langland, John Gower, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Occleve, Alexander Barclay, and the Earl of Surrey. If one adds to these *Old Plays* (1744) by Robert Dodsley; the works of the antiquarians of the previous century; eighteenth-century dictionaries and encyclopedias; and the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, William Collins, and Thomas Gray, one can see that Chatterton's imaginative resources were rich indeed.

Forging Medieval Poetry William Canning's name had been featured in leases, heraldry, buildings, grants of property, and bequests in documents housed in chests in a room of Saint Mary's Redcliff. Chatterton was so enthralled by the romantic figures that he made Thomas Rowley a sort of alter ego: Rowley was to be cast as priest, poet, and chronicler, and Canning was to become enshrined in the role of patron to Rowley. Chatterton began his writing efforts by "forging" medieval poetry using the passionate voice of his heroes and heroines to develop surrealistic, dreamlike narratives and vigorous, dramatic, and evocative poems. Chatterton also found a way to use the mythical qualities of his homeland, Bristol. The strategic role of Bristol as the gateway for the men who ventured from Bristol to fight in patriotic struggles against the invaders who threatened English independence was to be one of "Rowley's" primary themes.

As the martyred poet, Chatterton left an enormous impact with his untimely death. Alfred de Vigny, Robert Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Francis Thompson wrote about him. Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote a monody—a poem of lament—about him. Robert Southey edited his poems (1803). John Keats dedicated *Endymion* (1817) to him. George Meredith posed for Henry Wallis's painting of Chatterton' death, *Adonais*. William Wordsworth, listing in "Resolution and Independence" (1807) those poets to whom he owed most, described Chatterton as "the marvellous Boy, The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride" (1821). Chatterton also had a formidable influence on English, French, and German literature through his "Rowley" poems.

Works in Critical Context

Rowley Poems Elicit High Praise Chatterton has elicited high praise from writers, scholars, and critics of all literary periods, particularly when his Rowley Poems are juxtaposed against his premature death. While some of his contemporaries, like Horace Walpole, were less appreciative of his works, which had fooled them, Romantic poets like Percy Bysshe Shelley ranked Chatterton with

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Chatterton's famous contemporaries include:

Francis Fanny Burney (1752–1840): British diarist, novelist, and playwright, she was not only a prolific writer but is also considered to be a precursor to such writers as Jane Austen and William Makepeace Thackeray.

Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784): She was the first African American woman poet to publish and is said to be one of the first to influence the genre of African American literature.

John Wilkes (1725–1795): English writer and radical, he fought for the rights of citizens, rather than the House of Commons, to decide their representatives.

Giacomo Casanova (1725–1798): Venetian adventurer and author most famous for his womanizing.

Oliver Goldsmith (1730–1774): Anglo-Irish writer, poet, and physician known for works including *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) and *The Good-Natur'd Man* (1768).

Sir Philip Sidney as "inheritors of unfulfilled renown." For Rossetti, "Not to know Chatterton is to be ignorant of the *true* day-spring of modern romantic poetry." Keats wrote that "Chatterton...is the purest writer in the English Language...' tis genuine English idiom in English words." Chatterton ultimately came to represent to the Romantics and their successors a kind of idealism in the face of the rationalizing materialism of the eighteenth century. Modern scholar Linda Kelly describes Chatterton in *The Marvellous Boy* (1971) as a mythical figure evoking something beyond his achievement, a haunting reminder of the fascination and power of the imagination.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Consider Chatterton's reputation as an intentional literary imposter and a clever jokester who forged documents. Read his last writings (which you can find at Project Gutenberg and elsewhere on the Net). Consider whether the young man's last will and testament was a brilliant way to escape a dreary job, a hint at the poet's mental instability, or an actual goodbye.
- 2. In the context of Chatterton's life, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of publishing under someone else's name. What political, social, or psychological factors need to be considered?
- 3. Evaluate the "authenticity" of the poems Chatterton attributed to Rowley, citing examples from the works. In other words, what about these poems made them compelling enough to fool authors like Horace Walpole?

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Chatterton's later satiric verse relied more heavily on literary precedent, particularly the examples of Alexander Pope and Charles Churchill, for its study of society's inequity and evil. Here are a few works by authors who also wrote satires about their social sphere:

The Importance of Being Ernest (1895), a play by Oscar Wilde. In this comedy of errors, the etiquette of high society is mocked.

Main Street (1920), a novel by Sinclair Lewis. In this work the author makes a commentary on contemporary American values

The Miser (1668), a play by Molière. In this comical drama, grown children seek to get away from their miserly loanshark father.

A Modest Proposal (1729), a pamphlet by Jonathan Swift. In this satire the author offers a unique solution to the problem of poverty.

4. If you were to choose a pen name for yourself, what would it be and why? Would it have a hidden message behind it? Would there be a symbolic meaning? Would the name speak to who you are, something you like, something you value?

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@ Geoffrey Chaucer

BORN: c. 1343, London, England DIED: 1400, London, England NATIONALITY: British, English

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:
The Book of the Duchess (c. 1368–1372)
The Parliament of Fowles (c. 1378–1381)
Troilus and Criseyde (c. 1382–1386)
The Canterbury Tales (c. 1386–1400)

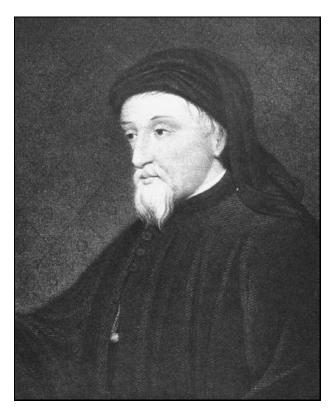
Overview

Widely regarded as the "father of English poetry," Geoffrey Chaucer is considered the foremost representative of Middle English literature. The originality of his language and style, the liveliness of his humor, the civility of his poetic demeanor, and the depth of his knowledge are continually cited as reasons for the permanence of his works. Due to his familiarity with French, English, Italian, and Latin literature, Chaucer was able to combine characteristics of each into a unique body of work that affirmed the rise of English as a literary language.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

The son of John and Agnes (de Copton) Chaucer, Geoffrey Chaucer was born into a family of London-based wine merchants sometime in the early 1340s. He would serve three successive kings—Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV.

Chaucer first appears in household records in 1357 as a page in the service of Elizabeth, the Countess of Ulster and wife of Prince Lionel, the third son of Edward III. By 1359 he served in King Edward's army in France during the early part of the Hundred Years' War, a protracted territorial struggle between England and France that persisted throughout the fourteenth century, but was captured during the unsuccessful siege of Rheims. The king contributed to his ransom the following year, freeing him from the French, and Chaucer must have entered the king's service shortly thereafter.



Geoffrey Chaucer Chaucer, Geoffrey, illustration.

In the Company of John of Gaunt By 1366, Chaucer married Philippa Pan, another courtier who attended the Countess of Ulster. She was the sister of Katharine Swynford, who became mistress and subsequently wife to John of Gaunt, Edward III's fourth son and the primary power behind the throne. John of Gaunt appears to have become Chaucer's patron, because the pair's fortunes rose and fell together for the next three decades. Chaucer traveled to Spain in 1366 on what would be the first of a series of diplomatic missions to the continent over the next decade. In 1368, the death of John of Gaunt's first wife, Blanche, the Duchess of Lancaster, occasioned Chaucer's composition of the Book of the Duchess, which was circulating by the time he went to France in 1370. Blanche had most likely died of the bubonic plague, a pandemic that started in central Asia and spread to Europe beginning in the 1340s, killing twenty to sixty percent of the population by the end of the century.

In this, his first major work, Chaucer attempts to soothe John of Gaunt's grief. Although most of the lines have parallels in other French court poetry, the *Book of the Duchess* never reads like "translation English," since it converts the insincere language and sentimental courtly romance imagery of the French models into a poignant reality—a beautiful woman is dead, and the Knight mourns her.

Italian Influences Chaucer traveled in Italy in 1372–1373, stopping in Genoa to negotiate a trade agreement and visiting Florence concerning loans for Edward III. He then returned to England and was appointed a customs official for the Port of London, a post he would hold until 1386. Chaucer's career as a civil servant continued to flourish; he visited France and Calais in 1376 and 1378, and Italy again in 1378, and he gained additional customs responsibilities in 1382.

Critics believe that Chaucer next wrote the *House of Fame* and the *Parlement of Foules* (c. 1378–1381). Although the exact sequence of these works is indeterminate, both are thought to comment upon the efforts to arrange a suitable marriage for the young Richard II, John of Gaunt's nephew: the *Parlement* on the unsuccessful efforts to gain the daughter of Charles V of France, and *Fame* on the actual betrothal of Richard with Anne of Bohemia in 1380.

Chaucer's love affair with the Italian language, nurtured by his visits in 1372–1373 to Genoa and Florence and in 1378 to Lombardy, flowered in the following decade with his composition of *Troilus and Criseyde*. By 1385, Chaucer was living in Kent, where he was appointed a justice of the peace. The following year he became a member of Parliament.

A Critique of Church Corruption The Canterbury Tales, started sometime around 1386, is considered Chaucer's masterpiece. Organized as a collection of stories told by a group of travelers on pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas à Becket in Canterbury, The Canterbury Tales reflects the diversity of fourteenth-century English life. Notable in the work are thinly veiled, and sometimes not-so-thinly veiled, criticisms of the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church. The Friar, for example, is a greedy man more concerned with profit than saving souls. The Summoner and the Pardoner are both villainous characters who prey on the genuine religious devotion of common people. Such characters are reflections of the growing concern over the corruption of the church—concerns that would ultimately lead to the Protestant Reformation in the early sixteenth century. The work also reflects the intellectual curiosity that characterized medieval Christianity. The character the Clerk, an impoverished young student from Oxford University, for example, is presented as highly sympathetic.

Bawdy Humor The Canterbury Tales is also filled with humor that can be considered bawdy, if not crude, even by modern standards. Some historians have speculated that the seemingly endless war between France and England and the terrible devastation of the bubonic plague prompted many people to seek simple physical enjoyment in life in any way they could, including in drinking, eating, and sex. Discussions of those types of pleasures, and jokes about them, are peppered throughout Chaucer's text. Chaucer originally planned to write more than one hundred stories for his Tales, but he died without finishing.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Chaucer's famous contemporaries include:

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375): Italian writer and poet, best known for *The Decameron* and for writing in the Italian vernacular.

Petrarch (1304–1374): Italian scholar and poet, famous for his love sonnets.

William Langland (c. 1332–c. 1386): probable author of *Piers Plowman*, an allegorical narrative poem.

Wat Tyler (1341–1381): leader of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 in England, a protest against high taxes and poor conditions for serfs; Tyler was killed by King Richard II's men, and the rebellion was put down.

John Gower (c. 1330–1408): English poet; wrote in French, Latin, and English.

Political Turmoil in England and Later Years

The end of the fourteenth century was full of political turmoil in England. Young King Richard II assumed full control of the government in 1381, but his uncle John of Gaunt remained highly influential. Richard proved an inept ruler. He was eventually deposed in 1399, and John of Gaunt's son, Henry Bolingbroke, became King Henry IV. Meanwhile Chaucer, buffeted by the constantly changing political winds, held and lost a variety of government posts. In December of 1396, he leased a house in the garden of Westminster Abbey because a house on church grounds granted him sanctuary from his creditors, and lived there for the remainder of his life. Geoffrey Chaucer died on October 25, 1400. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, primarily because his last residence was on the abbey grounds. So important was he deemed as a poet that the space around his tomb was later dubbed the Poets' Corner, and luminaries of English letters were laid to rest around him.

Works in Literary Context

Chaucer is renowned as a pioneer in English language literature primarily because he was one of the first writers of literature in English. Latin had long been the standard language for writing in Europe, although Chaucer had read and appreciated the works of such Italian-language writers as Boccaccio and Petrach, both of whom influenced his work.

Vernacular Literature: Writing in English In the fourteenth century, England had little literary reputation and English was not considered a "literary" language. English was considered a rough tongue, strictly a spoken language for the common people. Critic Jeffrey Helterman

explains, "It would have been surprising in the fourteenth century for anyone to think of writing in his native tongue, and this was particularly true for Chaucer's role models. The first impulse for a medieval writer who was writing something he wanted remembered was to write it in Latin." Chaucer, however, chose to write his major works in English, perhaps striking a blow for the common man. If Chaucer himself had not erased all doubt as to the power and beauty of the English language, fellow Englishman William Shakespeare would, two hundred years later, with brilliant plays written in blank verse English. Shakespeare followed consciously in the footsteps of Chaucer, and his debt to the earlier writer is widely noted by critics.

The Frame Tale The Canterbury Tales, although unfinished, is a brilliant advance on the frame tale as practiced by Boccaccio in The Decameron. A framed story is one which one or more stories are set within a situation that is laid out at the beginning: for example, in The Canterbury Tales, the narrative frame is the pilgrimage being made by all the characters. The stories told about and by the characters are set within this narrative frame. It should be noted that there is no certainty that Chaucer knew of The Decameron's existence. In the days before printing presses, fragments of a manuscript were gathered with no concern for a whole work or even an individual author; Chaucer may have known a tale from The Decameron without being aware of the whole book.

In *The Decameron*, the tales of the day hang statically on the pegs of a topic; not even the black plague impacts much on Boccaccio's tale-telling. His tales, clever as they are, remain isolated in the narrative. Not so in Chaucer—each character uses his tale as a weapon or tool to get back at or even with the previous tale teller.

Boccaccio and Chaucer were not the earliest or the only writers to use the frame tale. Plato's *Symposium* (written around 385 B.C.E.) uses an elaborate frame, but it is doubtful Chaucer was familiar with Plato's work (he mentions Plato in some of his writing, but his knowledge of Plato appears to come from secondary sources). Using a narrative frame has remained a popular literary technique by writers as diverse as Mary Shelley (see *Frankenstein*, 1818), Mark Twain (see "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," 1865), and Joseph Conrad (see *Heart of Darkness*, 1899).

Works in Critical Context

Chaucer is generally considered the father of English poetry, and *The Canterbury Tales* has been required reading for countless students over the generations. The influence of his work on generations of English-language writers is undisputed.

The Canterbury Tales Some critics have worried that such wide and shallow exposure of the reading public to Chaucer's work has diluted full appreciation for his complex contribution to literature. Critic Derek Traversi

says, "The appreciation of Geoffrey Chaucer has suffered a good deal in the past from his reputation as the 'Father of English poetry.' It has been easy to think of him as a 'naif,' the possessor of a charming simplicity of outlook which tends to convey itself, for a modern reader, through language considered 'picturesque' or simply childish, alternately 'quaint' or redolent of innocence for readers who think of themselves as more sophisticated and more psychologically complex." However, this view is not correct, Traversi argues: "His early poems show him engaged in exploring the possibilities of the English language as an instrument for sophisticated literary creation."

Chaucer's carefully, economically drawn characters have won praise from multiple readers and critics. As poet William Blake put it, over four hundred years after the book's first publication: "Of Chaucer's characters, as described in his *Canterbury Tales*, some of the names are altered by Time, but the Characters themselves for ever remain unaltered and consequently they are the Physiognomies or lineaments of Universal Human Life beyond which Nature never steps." Phyllis Hodgson agrees: "The confessions of the Reeve, the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner complete a portraiture as elaborate and subtle as could be expected of later fiction."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Read *World Without End*, by Ken Follett, a novel that takes place in England during the Black Death. Is that a world you wish you could live in? Why or why not? What is the starkest difference between that world and this one? How different are the values?
- 2. Around 1595, William Shakespeare wrote *Richard II*, which is about the same king who was Chaucer's patron. In a group, read the play, or parts of it, aloud. Alternatively, watch the BBC's production of *Richard II* starring Derek Jacobi, with an eye looking out for the politicking of the time. How does the medieval politics portrayed in it compare to today's political battles? What is essentially the same, and what is the most dramatic difference?
- 3. Chaucer chose to write in English at a time when educated people wrote in Latin or French. Write a one- or two-paragraph story using either text message abbreviations or the slang of your choice. Do you think writing like that will catch on throughout society? Is there a hierarchical perspective on language usage today? Does any one particular language get more respect than another? Why might that be so?
- 4. Using the Internet and your library's resources, research pilgrimages in the Middle Ages and today. Write an essay comparing the ideology behind them, the actual method and style of the pilgrimages, and their purpose. How have pilgrimages changed? How have they stayed the same? In a brief paragraph, imagine you are writing as an anchor person of a

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The setting for *The Canterbury Tales* is a pilgrimage, a trip to visit a holy place. Here are some other texts that deal with various pilgrimages.

On Pilgrimage (1998), a nonfiction work by Jennifer Lash.

A lapsed Catholic travels to pilgrimage sites in Europe after a battle with cancer.

One Thousand Roads to Mecca (1997), a nonfiction work by Michael Wolfe. A compilation of one thousand years' worth of pilgrimages to Mecca, told by two dozen Muslims.

Sacred Koyasan (2007), a nonfiction work by Philip L. Nicoloff. The author details a Buddhist's pilgrimage to an important Japanese religious center.

Travels with My Donkey (2004), a nonfiction work by Tim Moore. Humorous nonfiction account of the author's attempt to follow the five hundred-mile pilgrimage road to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, with a donkey.

major news program and describing the "typical" pilgrimage that you are watching as it proceeds down the streets where you live.

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Market Anton Chekhov

BORN: 1860, Taganrog, Russia DIED: 1904, Badenweiler, Germany

NATIONALITY: Russian GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Cherry Orchard (1904) Uncle Vanya (1899) The Three Sisters (1901)

Overview

Celebrated for his innovative methods in prose fiction and drama, Anton Chekhov is known for his ability to combine both tragedy and comedy in works that substitute dialogue for action and ambiguity for moral finality. While his most characteristic works begin with revelations of personal feelings and observations, they ultimately balance emotion with stylistic control. This detached, rational artfulness distinguishes his work from that of his Russian predecessors—namely, from the confessional abandons of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and the psychological fantasies of Nikolai Gogol. Though praised as an early



Anton Chekhov Time & Life Pictures / Getty Images

master of the short-story genre, Chekhov also helped initiate a new era in European theater, and his works continue to serve as models for the finest American and European writers of the twentieth century.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Responsibility Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born on January 16, 1860, in Taganrog, a Russian port city. Unlike the majority of well-known Russian writers who preceded him (who were aristocrats), Chekhov was only one generation removed from serfdom, a background that troubled him for many years. Serfs were Russian peasants who, in essence, were like slaves in that their lives were completely controlled by the aristocratic landowners whose fields they worked. Serfdom was abolished in Russia in 1861. Chekhov's grandfather had bought freedom for his family, and had established himself as the keeper of a shop. According to a collection of letters edited by Simon Karlinsky, Chekhov wrote friend and publisher Aleksei Sergeevich Suvorin in January 1889 about the difficulty of "squeez[ing] the slave's blood out of himself" in order to attain self-respect and independence not only as a man, but also as an author.

When his grocery store went bankrupt in 1876, Chekov's father moved to Moscow to escape debtors' prison. The rest of the family soon joined him, with the exception of Anton, who remained until 1879 in Taganrog to complete his secondary education. Chekhov received a scholarship to Moscow University, where he studied medicine and, because his father was incarcerated, began to provide his family with their main source of income. He carried this moral and financial responsibility for the rest of his life.

Humor and Suffering Encouraged by his older brother, Chekhov began submitting short, humorous pieces to popular magazines to earn money. In 1880, his first story was published in *Dragonfly*, a St. Petersburg journal. "A Letter from the Don Landowner Stepan Vladimirovich N. to His Learned Neighbor Dr. Fridrikh" parodies ridiculous pseudoscientific ideas held by the pompous, poorly educated gentry. For the next several years, Chekhov looked to the streets of Moscow for the characters and themes he would then capture in anecdotes, jokes, character sketches, dialogues, and spoofs on authors of romance and adventure for humor magazines in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Chekhov's adoption of material from his own life, a method that he would use throughout his career, offended many of his friends and family.

After graduating in 1884, Chekhov went into medical practice, but because most of his patients lived in poverty, writing became increasingly important to him for financial reasons. From 1883 to 1886, Chekhov wrote more than three hundred pieces for Nikolai Aleksandrovich Leikin,

the publisher of the St. Petersburg journal Fragments. Although he and Leikin often had editorial differences, Chekhov was maturing and developing his writing skills, as evidenced by a newfound seriousness in his stories. In fact, many scholars consider Chekhov's time under Leikin as extremely valuable formative years, for it was during this time that Chekhov came to the conclusion that suffering is a part of everyday existence. Unfortunately, Chekhov was to become very familiar with suffering: during this time, he began to exhibit symptoms of the tuberculosis that eventually killed him. Tuberculosis, also historically referred to as consumption, is an infectious and highly contagious disease that often causes bleeding lesions in the lungs, but can also affect most other parts of the body. In Chekhov's time, the disease was one of the greatest health threats in Europe; as late as 1918, one in six deaths in France was caused by tuberculosis. Doctors did not fully understand how the disease was spread until the 1880s, and the disease was not curable until effective antibiotics were developed in 1946.

Serious Writing In 1885, Chekhov moved to St. Petersburg and became friends with A. S. Suvorin, editor of the influential journal New Times. Impressed by Chekhov's literary talent, Suvorin encouraged the young writer to expand his gift with words, so Chekhov gave up writing for comic journals and began publishing more worldly stories in the New Times. In 1888, Chekhov published his first major literary short story, "The Steppe," in the Northern Messenger. In addition to publishing short stories during the 1880s, Chekhov was also writing dramas, beginning with such popular one-act plays, or, as he referred to them, "jokes," as The Bear (1888) and The Wedding Proposal (1888).

Social Responsibility In 1890, feeling restless and dissatisfied with his life, Chekhov traveled across Siberia to visit a penal colony on Sakhalin Island. Passionate about doing something practical to address the evils of Russian society, he based the book Sakhalin (1893), which calls for prison reform, on his observations there. Up to that point, the majority of Chekhov's works had been profoundly influenced by Leo Tolstoy's moral code, which included concepts of Christian love and nonresistance to evil; however, after his time on the island of Sakhalin, Chekhov rejected Tolstoy's ideas on the grounds that they provided an insufficient, unrealistic answer to human suffering. Chekhov was impatient with intellectual groups who only philosophized instead of taking action.

Major Dramas Beginning in 1892, Chekhov worked on *The Sea Gull*, his first major dramatic work, while treating peasants outside of Moscow during a cholera epidemic. When *The Sea Gull* was produced in St. Petersburg in 1896, it was a complete failure, primarily because audiences, directors, and actors alike did not appreciate Chekhov's concept of drama: that plot and action are

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Chekhov's famous contemporaries include:

Edith Wharton (1862–1937): Author of the American classics *The House of Mirth* and *Ethan Frome*, Wharton's primary preoccupation was with the conflict between social obligation and individual fulfillment.

Knut Hamsun (1859–1952): This Norwegian writer is best known for *Hunger*, a novel based on his experience as a laborer on the verge of starvation.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939): Freud is the father of psychoanalysis, which has had a profound impact on literature and literary theory.

Henry James (1843–1916): Many novels written by James explore the impact of European civilization on American development.

George Santayana (1863–1952): Santayana was a prominent philosopher who believed that reason does not lie in idealistic dreams, but in logical activity based on fact.

Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924): Wilson was the twentyeighth president of the United States and oversaw the country's involvement in World War I and the creation of the Federal Reserve system.

secondary to mood and dialogue. In spite of this negative reception, Chekhov soon earned the reputation as the innovator of modern Russian drama, in part because of the formation of the Moscow Art Theatre.

The Moscow Art Theatre staged a new production of *The Sea Gull* in 1898 that proved highly successful. During rehearsals, Chekhov met actress Olga Knipper, whom he later married. He continued to write for the Moscow Art Theatre, which premiered *The Three Sisters* in 1901. Despite complications from tuberculosis and his doctor's advice to rest, Chekhov pushed himself to complete *The Cherry Orchard* and then to attend rehearsals for the play. He suffered a complete collapse in the winter of 1903 and died on July 15, 1904, in a health resort in Badenweiler, Germany.

Works in Literary Context

While his short fiction owes much to such literary greats as Guy de Maupassant, Leo Tolstoy, and Ivan Turgenev, Chekhov's own influence on Western literature has proved vast. Writers from E. M. Forster to Virginia Woolf were inspired by Chekhov's prose style, especially his mastery of mood and setting, and his methods of developing character sketches that highlight the character's faults and human weaknesses. By developing innovative techniques, Chekhov reinvented the short-story genre. For example, he often

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

In 1861, Tsar Alexander II emancipated all serfs, initiating a new social order in Russian history. Although only a year old when the serfs were granted their freedom, Chekhov, the grandson of a former serf, explored the issue of class barriers in much of his writing. Listed below are other works in which plots revolve around social classes:

Miss Julie (1888), a drama by August Strindberg. In this naturalistic drama, the love affair between Miss Julie and Jean, her father's valet, demonstrates the often tragic consequences of breaking class barriers.

Madame Bovary (1857), a novel by Gustave Flaubert.

Flaubert's story investigates how striving for higher social status results in the destruction of Emma Bovary.

A Passage to India (1924), a novel by E. M. Forster. Set in India in the mid-1800s, this work tells the story of two Englishwomen who break social and cultural barriers when they become friends with an Indian man.

ends stories with a "zero ending," a conclusion born from realism that is anticlimactic. Other stories, however, have surprise endings. Because of Chekhov's originality, readers for over one hundred years have admired his works, particularly for their humanity and authenticity.

Indirect Action Climate, environment, furniture, sound effects, costumes, characters—every element in Chekhov's plays enhances mood and meaning. Such intricacy has made his dramas popular with both audiences and actors and almost impossible to imitate effectively. Chekhov's four major dramas are distinguished principally for their technique of "indirect action," a method in which violent or intensely dramatic events take place offstage. Therefore, the main action consists of conversations alluding to the unseen moments in the characters' lives. In this way, Chekhov more precisely conveys the effects of crucial events on a character's personality. The first drama written in this manner was The Sea Gull, which was a complete failure when it debuted in St. Petersburg. Nonetheless, it was produced successfully in Moscow two years later under the direction of Constantin Stanislavsky, who contributed to the play's artistic success with a subtle interweaving of theme and character. As a result, action is reduced to a minimum, thereby allowing nuances of pacing and mood to become paramount to the full realization of dramatic tension.

Works in Critical Context

In comparison with works of other great Russian authors, Chekhov's writings often depict situations of boredom, hardship, and suffering. *Uncle Vanya*, for example,

focuses on the influence of economic and social conditions on everyday life and people's inability to change. Chekhov portrays the ordinariness of life, bringing to the stage a realism that avoids the epic scale of traditional drama, yet also demonstrates previously unrealized possibilities for the stage. In an essay in *Chekhov: The Critical Heritage*, Francis Fergusson writes, "If Chekhov drastically reduced the dramatic art, he did so in full consciousness, and in obedience both to artistic scruples and to a strict sense of reality. He reduced the dramatic art to its ancient root, from which new growths are possible."

Art of Melancholy Emphasizing the darker aspects of Chekhov's work, some critics believe his art is one of melancholy. Oftentimes, for instance, the mood and meaning of Chekhov's drama hover between the tragic and comic, imparting the idea that life is futile and absurd. Viewing Chekhov as a total pessimist, though, has often been met with opposition, especially from those critics who approach his work from a historical perspective, seeing him as a writer who has chronicled the degeneration of the landowning classes during an era of imminent revolution. Scholars have long tried to determine the degree to which the somber sprit of Chekhov's stories and plays reflects his personal philosophy; however, Chekhov's importance in world literature is not so much a result of his philosophical worldview as of the artistry that transformed literary standards for the genres of fiction and drama.

The Cherry Orchard Since its first production, controversy has surrounded the interpretation of Chekhov's last play, The Cherry Orchard, which he subtitled "A Comedy," intending for it to be viewed as such. Often perceived as a nostalgic parable about the dissolution of an older class in Russian history, this work displays one of Chekhov's most important themes: the triumph of ignorance and vulgarity over elegance and nobility. Referring to what he called Chekhov's "tragic humor," Maksim Gorky comments, "One has only to read his 'humorous' stories with attention to see what a lot of cruel and disgusting things, behind the humorous words and situations, had been observed by the author with sorrow and were concealed by him." Despite the bleakness of the characters' situations, some critics recognize the inescapable humor of the play. For example, in a piece included in Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays Dorothy Sayers writes that "the whole tragedy of futility is that it never succeeds in achieving tragedy. In its blackest moments it is inevitably doomed to the comic gesture."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Research the Russian class system that evolved after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. How do the new social classes relate to the characters in *The Cherry Orchard*?
- 2. Explore the rise of the Moscow Art Theatre and its importance to Chekhov. Also, investigate the

influence of its director, Constantin Stanislavsky, on the school of method acting that was taught by Sanford Meisner and Lee Strasberg in America and popularized by such actors as Robert De Niro, Jane Fonda, and Dennis Hopper.

- 3. Chekhov intended for *The Cherry Orchard* to be a comedy. Nevertheless, when it was produced at the Moscow Art Theater, it was presented as a tragedy. Chekhov was so frustrated by the failure of the director and critics to view the play as a comedy that he burned all but one copy of the manuscript. After evaluating *The Cherry Orchard*, write a review of the play in which you explain whether you agree with Chekhov or the director as to the kind of play it is. Include a paragraph in your review discussing why you believe Chekhov reacted so extremely to the play's depiction as a tragedy.
- 4. Chekhov said that the city of Perm was a model for the type of provincial city that provides the setting for *The Three Sisters*. Research what daily life would have been like in a provincial Russian town at the turn of the century, and then compare it with what life in Moscow would have been like at the same time. Where would you have preferred to live? Why?

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BORN: 1874, London, England

DIED: 1936, Buckinghamshire, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Wild Knight and Other Poems (1900) The Man Who Was Thursday (1908) Orthodoxy (1909)
The Innocence of Father Brown (1911)

Overview

Regarded as one of England's premier men of letters during the first third of the twentieth century, Chesterton is best known today as a colorful character who created the Father Brown mysteries and the fantasy novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*. His witty essays have also provided delight and inspiration to generations of readers.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Joyous Childhood in Kensington Gilbert Keith Chesterton was born in the London borough of Kensington to Edward Chesterton, who owned a real estate business, and Marie Louise Grosjean Chesterton. The religious atmosphere of his middle-class family was more liberal and Unitarian than Anglican, and religion seems to have played no important part in his early life. At the same time, Chesterton's childhood was a time of intense happiness, and he always claimed that this happiness provided him with an essential religious insight into the meaning of adult life.

His early schooling and his years at St. Paul's School (1887–1892) seem to have been in general a continuation of the undisturbed happiness of childhood. He was not regarded as a good student, but he made friends at school and did a good deal of writing for a school paper called the *Debater*, the journal of a debating club he had organized. But his real talent was believed to be his ability to draw. Consequently, instead of following the rest of his friends to university, he went to a drawing school, first at St. John's Wood and then in 1893 to the Slade School of Art

From Pictures to Letters: A London Career When he left the Slade School in 1895, Chesterton worked as a publisher's reader for two different companies and contributed an occasional poem, article, or art criticism to journals such as the Clarion, the Speaker, and the Academy.

Chesterton was first noticed in 1899 for his contributions to the *Speaker*, a radical liberal magazine. By early 1901 Chesterton was also established as a regular Saturday columnist for another liberal journal, the *Daily News*, where his weekly article quickly became a feature of Edwardian journalism. The enormously popular "Notebook" articles in the *Illustrated London News* began to appear soon afterward and continued almost without interruption from September of 1905 until his death in June of 1936. At the same time, he began to produce biographies, novels, and books of literary and theological criticism that consolidated his reputation as a literary journalist and religious teacher.



G. K. Chesterton Hulton Archive / Getty Images

Christianity and Chesterton's World of Fiction The best known works of this time were his 1908 fantasy novel, The Man Who Was Thursday, and the very popular series of short stories involving a ministerial sleuth, the "Father Brown" mysteries, first introduced in 1910. Both were reflections of Chesterton's own experiences with religion and spirituality. In The Man Who Was Thursday, a man secretly working for Scotland Yard infiltrates a group of anarchist masterminds in an effort to destroy the organization. Though the book is superficially about anarchists-those who reject laws and governments in favor of complete free will—the book relies heavily on Christian symbolism and imagery. This same preoccupation with Christianity is found in Chesterton's most famous character, Father Brown. The clever priest who uses his reasoning and intuition to solve crimes was based on an actual priest Chesterton knew named Father John O'Connor. O'Connor ultimately convinced Chesterton to convert to Catholicism in 1922.

Witnessing and Politics Although he met his friend and colleague Hilaire Belloc in 1900 and was married to Francis Blogg in 1901, the years immediately prior to

World War I were a time of political crisis and personal strain for Chesterton. In 1913 his brother Cecil was convicted of the criminal libel of Godfrey Isaacs in connection with a press campaign waged by the *New Witness* magazine against various politicians and stockbrokers involved in the Marconi insider trading scandal. As Maisie Ward points out in her biography of Chesterton, the case became almost an obsession with him for the rest of his life. His disillusionment with official English political life was now complete, and the tone of his political writing became increasingly bitter and acrimonious.

A good example of this is "A Song of Strange Drinks" (1913), which first appeared in the *New Witness*. Although this poem is usually read as an example of pure nonsense verse, in fact it is sharply satirical, and its publication led to Chesterton's dismissal from the *Daily News*.

A Decline in Health and England's March Toward War The bitterness of these years also affected Chesterton in other ways. His health began to deteriorate rapidly. Many events contributed to this breakdown. He became more and more alarmed at events in Ireland, where a situation close to civil war

had been developing. In 1913 he began writing a series of articles for the *Daily Herald*, which are among the most violent articles he ever wrote. The outbreak of war in August added even more serious worries. By late autumn of 1914, under the double burden of anxiety and overwork, his health began to fail. The last of the *Daily Herald* articles appeared in September of 1914, and by November he was critically ill. The collapse of his health was both physical and mental. By the end of November he had fallen into a coma, which seems to have been caused by some form of kidney and heart trouble. He did not begin to recover until Easter of 1915.

Chesterton's return to health was very gradual. His illness marks a great division in his life as a writer and an even greater division in his life as a poet. From 1915 onward, he devoted himself more and more to a different kind of journalism that left him little time for imaginative writing. Almost as soon as Chesterton fully recovered from his illness in 1916, his brother Cecil joined the army. In his absence, Chesterton took over the editorship of the *New Witness*, and he continued to edit this magazine and others until his death in 1936.

Although he did not participate directly in World War I himself, Chesterton bore witness to a generation of young men returning from mainland Europe spiritually and physically broken. His own life ended suddenly on June 14, 1936. He had again gradually fallen ill during the preceding years, even though there had been few signs of any slackening of his literary activity during that period.

Works in Literary Context

As a literary journalist, Chesterton was very much in the tradition of the Victorian sage. He was at once a teacher and a literary artist. He sought to change society through his teaching, using symbol, parable, and religious allegory as the most effective way of doing so. Chesterton's verse, therefore, must be read as part of the vast journalistic effort whereby he sought to influence the thinking and the feeling of his age. At the same time, it is important to understand the special character of this influence.

A Spiritual Literary Figure Like his close friends George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, he preferred the role of teacher and prophet to that of literary man, but unlike them his vision of life was fundamentally Christian and even mystical, and the influence he sought to exercise through his writings was directed toward a social change that would be thoroughly religious. In this sense, he may be more aptly compared to the tradition of spiritually oriented literary journalism later represented by C. S. Lewis. Hence, the themes of many of his most characteristic poems are religious; likewise, his religious verse also has a strongly political tone.

In his poetry, as in his other writings, Chesterton saw himself as a spokesman for the poor and the exploited, whom he regarded as the mystical symbols of God's

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Chesterton's famous contemporaries include:

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950): Irish playwright who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925 and is best known for his wit and social satire.

Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953): This English poet was a good friend and collaborator of Chesterton's.

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965): Schweitzer, a French theologian and Nobel Peace Prize winner, put his "Reverence for Life" philosophy to work by building a hospital in Gabon, Africa.

Carl Jung (1875–1961): Drawing heavily on the work of Sigmund Freud and of anthropologists looking at social symbol systems and mythologies, this Swiss psychiatrist was the founder of analytical psychology.

Clarence Darrow (1857–1938): An American lawyer and civil rights advocate best known for his work with unions and his defense of Tennessee teacher John Scopes at the famous Scopes "Monkey" trial of 1925, in which Scopes was brought up on charges for teaching the theory of evolution in his classroom.

presence in the world. The purpose of his verse and of all his writings was to help create a society that would have a deep religious respect for ordinary people.

Distributism A centerpiece of this purpose was the social philosophy that Chesterton called *Distributism*. Economically, distributism meant a property-owning democracy in which private property would be divided into the smallest possible units. Socially, distributism aimed at creating a feeling of community and neighborliness among ordinary people, in contrast to the feeling of alienation created by huge impersonal systems such as state socialism and monopoly capitalism (to be succeeded by modern corporate capitalism). Such systems, in Chesterton's view, treated ordinary people as interchangeable units. Chesterton's perspective on such matters anticipated the sort of Catholic socialism that would become particularly prevalent in Latin America over the course of the twentieth century.

Irreverent Paradox Chesterton is recognized as a master of the irreverent paradox, and a recognition of this is crucial to understanding his work. Through paradox, the seemingly self-evident is turned upside down, causing readers to view their initial beliefs in a different light. The shedding of a different light was part of Chesterton's purpose, and the irreverent or humble paradox was, he said, his "chief idea of life." His essay "A Defense of Nonsense" perhaps best summarizes his views on this

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of Chesterton'ss defining characteristics was his use of paradox to illustrate his point. Here are a few other works that use irreverent, sometimes even silly paradoxes to communicate and explore important points about life.

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895), a play by Sir Oscar Wilde. Rhetorical and situational paradoxes abound in this drawing-room comedy by the great Irish wit.

"The Library of Babel," (1941), a short story by Jorge Luis Borges. In this fantastical story, a library contains every possible variation of a single 410-page book. In the same vein, Borges writes elsewhere about a map so large that it covers precisely, in 1:1 detail, everything it attempts to represent, so that it lays like a gigantic carpet over the land.

Gargantua (1534), a novel by Francois Rabelais. This novel by French writer Rabelais satirizes monasteries as places of leisure rather than spirituality.

method: "Nonsense and faith (strange as the conjunction may seem) are the two supreme symbolic assertions of the truth that to draw out the soul of things with a syllogism is as impossible as to draw out Leviathan with a hook." In this, Chesterton finds himself in the very good company of philosophers ranging from Erasmus to Søren Kierkegaard.

Works in Critical Context

Despite Chesterton's lasting popularity, critics generally agree that between his wide spectrum of subjects, his self-proclaimed role as a "mere journalist," and his tendency toward irreverence, Chesterton is a "master who left no masterpiece."

Something of a Poet, but Perhaps Not Much W. H. Auden argued that Chesterton was by natural gift a comic poet and that none of his serious poems is as good as his comic verse. "I cannot think of a single comic poem by Chesterton," Auden wrote, "that is not a triumphant success." Auden particularly praised *Greybeards at Play*, writing, "I have no hesitation in saying that it contains some of the best pure nonsense verse in English, and the author's illustrations are equally good."

Auden notwithstanding, Chesterton's reputation as a poet, which never rose particularly high during his lifetime, declined still further after his death. The conventional view of him as a poet has been that he wrote a few exquisite lyrics; helped popularize, through his satirical ballads, an effective kind of comic verse; and in his most

important narrative poem, *The Ballad of the White Horse*, wrote an imperfect but partly successful English epic poem. The revival of critical interest in Chesterton during recent years has also made it possible to view his verse in a new light, revealing the close connection between his poetry and his everyday journalism.

The Father Brown Mysteries Father Brown remains, in the minds of most readers, Chesterton's greatest creation, although his other contributions to the art of mystery writing are also recognized. "If Chesterton had not created Father Brown," scholar Thomas Leitch declares, "his detective fiction would rarely be read today, but his place in the historical development of the genre would still be secure." "Long before he published his last Father Brown stories," Leitch continues, "Chesterton was widely regarded as the father of the modern English detective story. When Anthony Berkeley founded the Detection Club in 1928, it was Chesterton, not [Sherlock Holmes creator Arthur] Conan Doyle, who became its first president and served in this capacity until his death." In addition, Leitch asserts, Chesterton "was the first habitual writer of detective stories...to insist on the conceptual unity of the form, a criterion he expounded at length in several essays on the subject."

Under the influence of Chesterton's Father Brown, the mystery story became less a portrait of the detective's personality, and more a puzzle that the detective and the reader could both solve. "Chesterton's determination to provide his audience with all the clues available to his detectives," observes Leitch, "has been so widely imitated as to become the defining characteristic of the formal or golden age period (roughly 1920-1940) in detective fiction.... Modern readers, for whom the term whodunit has become synonymous with detective story, forget that the concealment of the criminal's identity as the central mystery of the story is a relatively modern convention." Chesterton was, however, much more than "merely" a mystery writers. As American Chesteron Society president Dale Ahlquist notes, "Chesterton wrote about everything."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Much of Chesterton's work was either implicitly or explicitly political. "A Song of Strange Drinks" is one example of personal politics inspiring what appears to be a work of silliness. Examine any of his light verse for political statement. Do you think the underlying messages in Chesterton's light verse diminish or strengthen its importance as poetry? Why?
- 2. Chesterton has been called "the master who left no masterpiece." Does the lack of a "masterpiece" detract from his stature as a writer? Should it? Why or why not?

- 3. Chesteron often employed the literary device of paradox in his work. What is paradox and how is it used in Chesterton's work?
- 4. The Father Brown character is Chesterton's most beloved creation. In what ways is he similar to and different from his near contemporary, Sherlock Holmes?

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T'ao Ch'ien

BORN: 365, China
DIED: 427, China
NATIONALITY: Chinese

GENRE: Poetry

MAJOR WORKS:

Poetic Works (1883)

T'ao the Hermit: Sixty Poems (1952)

Works (1956)

Overview

Also known as Qian Tao or Ch'ien T'ao, T'ao Yüan-ming T'ao Ch'ien was one of China's foremost poets in the five-word *shih* style. He was not recognized as a major poet until the T'ang dynasty (618–907). By the Song times (960–1279), however, his status as one of China's greatest lyrical poets had become generally recognized, and his poetry has never ceased to fascinate the Chinese since.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Ch'ien's famous contemporaries include:

Alaric (370–410): King of the Visigoths who sacked Rome in 410

Theodosius I (347–395): The last emperor of both the Eastern and Western Roman Empires, he made Christianity the official state religion.

Attila the Hun (406–453): Infamous leader of the Hun horde and enemy of the late Roman Empire.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Secluded Life T'ao Ch'ien lived during the Eastern Chin and Liu Sung dynasties of the fourth and fifth centuries. He was born in Ch'ai-sang in present-day Kiangsi Province, the great-grandson of T'ao K'an, a famed Chin general. Both his grandfather and father had served as prefects, but by T'ao Ch'ien's time the family must have become poorer, and despite his preference for a life of seclusion, he held at least four different posts during some dozen years (393–405) in order to support his family.

T'ao did not serve very long, however, in his last post as magistrate of P'eng-tse. According to a famous anecdote recorded in his official biographies, he resigned when summoned to appear before a superior so that he did not have to bow in obeisance for the sake of a meager salary. Upon returning home afterward, he wrote a sequence of five-word poems as well as a long poem titled "On Returning Home" in celebration of his liberation from the shackles of official life. He was then only forty years old. Subsequently, many eminent men sought him out for an official appointment, but he declined. He apparently enjoyed the remainder of his life as a gentleman farmer, reading his favorite books at leisure, exchanging visits with his neighbors, and observing the lack of promise of his several sons.

Like much of Chinese lyricism, T'ao's poetry is an expression of personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It is thus important to remember that he was also an ardent visionary forced by political and social ills to choose a hermit's life for his last twenty years. Virtually isolated in the political and artistic ethos of the day, T'ao was largely left in oblivion for three centuries after his death before being recognized by the poets of the High T'ang period, and it was another three centuries before he was fully appreciated by the Song era writers. It was at this point that the Chinese lyric vision of nature came to maturity.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Though T'ao Ch'ien was certainly cerebral, he also celebrated pastoral, humble ideas. He was impressed by the fields and blossoms and by farmers and their flocks. Here are some other works that consider the value of the simple, natural life:

Idylls (third century BCE), a poetry collection by Theocritus. Probably the first collection of pastoral poetry, this book centers around the mythical Greek gods who are, in this instance at least, very down to earth.

"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1590s), a poem by Christopher Marlowe. This poem begins with the famous line "Come live with me and be my love."

As You Like It (1599–1600), a play by William Shakespeare. Set in the forest of Arden, this comedic play involves love, disguises, and intrigue.

Lycidas (1638), a poem by John Milton. Herdsmen, pipes, and sheep populate this poem, an elegy written for the poet's friend.

Works in Literary Context

Taoism and Confucianism T'ao Ch'ien is often described as a Taoist nature poet with a fondness for wine and chrysanthemums. Taoism is an ancient Chinese philosophy that sees the universe as a whole and stresses the connection between humans and nature. He is also, however, a meditative poet. He represents the culmination of the five-word poetry of the Han dynasty and its obsession with life's meaning. Additionally, his poetry is infused with a strong attraction to the teaching of Confucius, another Chinese philosophical system based on the teaching of Confucius (551–479 B.C.E., a philosopher who stressed the importance of right action and self-control.

A Contented Solitude The view of T'ao Ch'ien as a Taoist recluse is supported by some of his most celebrated works. In a brief autobiography, he styles himself "Mr. Five Willows" and speaks of his contentment with poverty, his fondness for wine, and his joy in reading, though he makes no attempt to probe the deeper meanings of books. His prose description of the Peach Fount Colony living in happy oblivion of the outside world has been celebrated since his time as the Taoist vision of a simple, good life unrealizable on earth.

The Pastoral Life Many of T'ao Ch'ien's earlier poems show an appreciation of the freedom and vulnerability of rural existence—from the delights of work and familial contentment to material privation and plaintive reflection. They feature not rustic or aesthetic shepherds but real farmers worried about their crops. Tao's farm-

stead poetry is marked by plain, lucid language and a simple, direct voice. These poems have as their objects hills, birds, fish, pines, and chrysanthemums.

Works in Critical Context

The simplicity and seemingly effortless ease of T'ao's poetry are artistic attributes reflective of his own nature and determined by his ideals. Poetry, for T'ao, became witness and companion to his life, the sustaining mainstay of his idealism, and the fortifying inspiration that enabled him at times to attain a spiritual transcendence.

Farmstead Poetry T'ao is best known for his "farmstead poetry" (tianyuan shi), which has often been called "pastoral." Certainly some of his poems—especially those from the earlier years after his permanent withdrawal from society, such as "Return Home"-sing of the peacefulness of country dwelling, the harmony of domestic life, and of a return to nature that is also a return to the natural Way (Tao) and original human nature. Vibrant with a conversational vitality and immediacy, his "farmer's words" blend life and art into a presentation lacking embellishment. The concerns of his livelihood concerns that constitute what, until then, was assumed to be "unfitting" content for verse—and the "inelegant" language of such concerns, which infuses his style, mark the literary and cultural originality of a poetry that records heartfelt experience.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Compare T'ao Ch'ien's earlier poetry to his later works. What changes do you notice, both in content and style? What do you think accounts for these changes?
- 2. Look up what *pastoral* means and determine if T'ao Ch'ien's works should be placed in this category.
- 3. Research the history of Chinese dynasties and identify the cultural characteristics of each. Why do you think T'ao Ch'ien's poetry was ignored until the T'ang dynasty?
- 4. T'ao Ch'ien's "Peach Blossom Spring" has often been described as the poet's version of a utopia. Can you find other descriptions of utopia in more recent works of art? Do visions of perfection seem to change over time?

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Magatha Christie

BORN: 1890, Torquay, England DIED: 1976, Wallingford, England

NATIONALITY: British GENRE: Fiction, Drama

MAJOR WORKS:

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1926) Murder on the Orient Express (1934)

The Mousetrap (1952)

Witness for the Prosecution (1953)

Overview

Agatha Christie is the most commercially successful woman writer of all time and probably the most widely read author of the twentieth century. A master of the murder mystery, her dozens of novels, stories, and plays have been translated into more than one hundred languages and have sold a phenomenal two billion copies—a record topped only by the Bible and the works of William Shakespeare. Her drama *The Mousetrap* opened on the London stage in 1952 and has yet to close; it is the longest-running play in theater history. Her ingenious plots, usually involving a mysterious



Agatha Christie Christie, Agatha, photograph. The Library of Congress.

death among a group of upper-middle-class British characters, invariably stumped crime buffs and largely defined the popular genre of the whodunit.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Christie was born by the name of Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller on September 13, 1890, in the English seaside resort of Torquay, in Devon. She was the youngest of three children of Frederick Alvah Miller, an American from New York, and Clarissa Boehmer Miller. Her father died when she was a child, and until she was sixteen she was educated at home by her mother. She became an avid reader as a child, enjoying mysteries and often improvising them with her sister, Madge. She attended finishing school in Paris and initially considered a musical career.

Begins Career on a Dare In 1912, Agatha Miller became engaged to Archibald Christie, a colonel in the Royal Air Corps; they were married on Christmas Eve, 1914. The couple was separated for most of the war years. Agatha Christie continued to live at Ashfield, her family's Victorian villa in Torquay. She volunteered as a nurse and worked as a pharmaceutical dispenser in local hospitals. Her knowledge of poisons, evident in many of her mysteries, developed through these experiences. After the war, her husband went into business in London, while Christie remained at home with their daughter, Rosalind, born in 1919.

Christie wrote her first novel after her sister challenged her to try her hand at writing a mystery story. The result, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was published in 1920. Like many of her subsequent classics, it features the detective Hercule Poirot, a former member of the Belgian police force. Although this maiden effort only sold some two thousand copies, the publication encouraged her to continue writing mysteries. Throughout the 1920s she wrote them steadily, building a loyal following among mystery aficionados for her unfailingly clever plots.

With her eighth book, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), Christie gained notoriety, and her deceptive plotting caught the attention of the general reading public. The sheer audacity of the novel's resolution—in which the murderer is ultimately revealed to be the narrator of the story, a character traditionally above suspicion in mystery novels—prompted a heated debate among mystery devotees. Christie's violation of the crime genre's conventions outraged some readers, but delighted many more. From that point, her reputation was established. For the next half-century, she was rarely absent from the best-seller lists.

Divorce and Remarriage Christie's personal life had become troubled, however. Shortly after her mother's death, her husband asked for a divorce so that he could marry another woman. These emotional blows brought on a nervous breakdown. In December 1926 she disappeared for ten days, attracting great publicity. After this incident, Christie shunned the public eye for the rest of her life. Her divorce was finalized in 1928.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Christie's famous contemporaries include:

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941): British novelist and essayist, author of *To the Lighthouse* and *A Room of One's Own*.

Raymond Chandler (1888–1959): American crime novelist, creator of the private detective Philip Marlowe.

James N. Cain (1892–1977): American novelist, master of "hard-boiled" detective fiction; author of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

Dorothy L. Sayers (1893–1957): British novelist and dramatist, creator of the amateur detective Lord Peter Wimsey.

Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980): Popular British filmmaker and producer, the "master of suspense."

Cecil Day-Lewis (1904–1972): Irish poet, author of mystery novels under the pseudonym Nicholas Blake.

Two years after her divorce, however, while traveling on the Orient Express to see the excavations at Ur in Turkey, she met archaeologist Max Mallowan, whom she married the same year. During the 1930s, the couple divided their time between their several homes in England and many archaeological expeditions in the Middle East. Christie acted as her husband's assistant on these digs, but she never stopped writing during her travels. This period provided Christie with experience of other cultures and a valuable distance from her own British one. She set several of her best-known works, including *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and *Death on the Nile* (1937), in exotic locales. Many of her other novels and plays are set in the British countryside, where corruption and crime lurk beneath the placid surface of middle-class life.

Poirot and Miss Marple Christie was most famous for the literary creation of Hercule Poirot, one of detective fiction's most famous sleuths. In his black jacket, striped trousers, and bow tie, the diminutive Belgian appeared in thirty-three novels and more than fifty short stories. Poirot regularly referred to the "little grey cells" of his brain; he relied primarily on reason in solving crimes, shunning the more physical and laborious tactics of A. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and other investigators. Christie grew distinctly sour on the pompous Poirot over the years—an occupational hazard for authors in the detective genre—yet she continued to crank out Poirot mysteries to meet the demands of her readers. She did, however, eliminate him from the stage versions of several of her stories, believing that Poirot was a more effective character in print.

In the novel *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), Christie introduced her other well-known detective: Miss Jane Marple, a genteel, elderly spinster who resides in a rural English village. Miss Marple is in many ways the antithesis of Poirot. Miss Marple works largely by intuition to solve crimes, often finding clues in village gossip. One of her most effective traits is her shrewd skepticism, which prevents her from taking anyone she meets at face value.

World War II brought about a major change in Christie's life. Her husband served as an intelligence liaison officer in North Africa while Christie remained in London, working again as a volunteer dispenser. In her off hours, she was busy writing.

During the war years, Christie published ten novels and adapted two of her earlier works for the theater. Two of her wartime manuscripts were not published until decades later; these were the final Poirot and Miss Marple mysteries. Their author secreted them in a vault, to be published after her death.

Stage Triumphs Christie's work for the theater has proved as enduringly popular as her fiction and as full of cleverly constructed plots and surprise endings. Most of her plays are adaptations of her own stories or novels. One such work, originally titled Ten Little Niagers and subsequently retitled Ten Little Indians (1943), uses a children's nursery rhyme to build suspense. Ten strangers assemble for a holiday on a small island, where, one by one, they are murdered. The combination of terror and orderly predictability creates a memorable theatrical mechanism.

The success of her early plays pales before the phenomenon of *The Mousetrap* (1952), which is now in its sixth decade of uninterrupted performances on the London stage. Despite the success of the work, Christie received no royalties for it. She gave the rights to her nine-year-old grandson when the play first opened; the grandson, it is estimated, has since earned well over fifteen million pounds Sterling from his grandmother's gift. The year after *The Mousetrap* opened, Christie scored another smash with *Witness for the Prosecution* (1953).

Christie's powers gradually declined in the decades after World War II, but she retained her towering popularity and reputation as the "Queen of Crime." In 1971, she was made a Dame of the British Empire. Her last formal appearance was in 1974, at the opening of the film version of *Murder on the Orient Express*. As her health failed, her publishers persuaded her to release the final Poirot and Marple mysteries. *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* (1975) takes the detective back to Styles Court, the location of Christie's first mystery. Poirot's pursuit of an elusive killer leads to his inadvertent suicide. The death of Poirot caused a sensation, making the papers even in the People's Republic of China, and spurring the *New York Times* to publish, for the first time, an obituary for a fictional character. Christie herself died the following year.

Works in Literary Context

Agatha Christie enjoyed a wide selection of literature in her youth. The novelist Eden Philpotts, a neighbor, visited frequently and became a mentor to the homeschooled child. The Sherlock Holmes mysteries by A. Conan Doyle were a mainstay of her teenage years. Christie followed Doyle's formula to some extent early on; for example, in her first mysteries, she gave Poirot a Watsonlike sidekick, Captain Hastings. Other literary influences upon Christie were Edgar Allan Poe, G. K. Chesterton (who wrote the Father Brown detective stories), and the American detective novelist Anna Katherine Green.

Mystery Puzzles Gamesmanship and subtle deception were the secrets of Christie's success. The best of her novels are intricate puzzles, presented in such a way as to misdirect the reader's attention away from the most important clues. The solution of the puzzle is invariably startling, although entirely logical and consistent with the rest of the story. Like a magician's sleight of hand, a Christie mystery dispenses red herrings, ambiguities, shadings, and other subterfuges that keep the attentive reader baffled, until the story culminates in a satisfying surprise. In works such as Ten Little Indians and The A. B. C. Murders (1936), Christie uses nursery rhymes and other children's games, uncovering their more sinister implications.

Straightforward Style As befits this most commercial of novelists, her writing style was supremely unpretentious. She told stories in a straightforward manner, rarely injecting any thoughts or feelings of her own. She usually sketched her characters with the lightest of touches so that readers from any country could flesh them out to fit their own backgrounds. Her novels are frequently set in the English countryside, and usually focus on a group of upper-middle-class British characters and the detective who reveals the perpetrator at a final gathering of the suspects. One common theme that emerges from this genre formula is a concern with appearances, such as the respectable facade of parochial life, and the corruption and criminality that surface appearances conceal.

The Detective Another important factor in Christie's popularity is surely her ability to create charming and enduring detective characters. Both of her primary sleuths, Hercule Poirot and Jane Marple, gain reader sympathy from the way they are underestimated by other characters. Poirot, with his small stature, Belgian background, and amusing pomposity, arouses derision and, occasionally, ethnic prejudice. Similarly, Christie plays on Miss Marple's eccentricities, in addition to her age and gender, to manipulate the reader into trivializing her capabilities. When the detective defies expectations and solves the crime, the resolution is that much more delicious.

Works in Critical Context

Agatha Christie began writing at the start of what became known as the golden age of the detective story, when mysteries were attaining worldwide popularity. As she continued to turn out books, her name became in the

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Agatha Christie was one of the most prominent practitioners of a very popular literary genre, the murder mystery. Below are some of the more memorable titles, and heroes, of the whodunit.

"The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), by Edgar Allan Poe. Often considered the first detective story, Poe's "tale of ratiocination" established some of the conventions of crime fiction.

The Maltese Falcon (1930), by Dashiell Hammett. A detective novel with a dizzying plot, made into a classic motion picture starring Humphrey Bogart as the morally ambiguous private eye Sam Spade.

Maigret at the Crossroads (1931), by Georges Simenon.

Maigret, the pipe-smoking inspector, is the protagonist of seventy-five novels and one of the best-known characters in popular French literature.

L.A. Confidential (1990), by James Ellroy. Three Los Angeles police officers, investigating the same homicide case, slowly uncover their own precinct's connections to organized crime, in this suspense novel made into a celebrated film.

A Ticket to the Boneyard (1991), by Lawrence Block. The hero of this detective story, private investigator Matt Scudder, struggles with alcoholism while tracking down a psychotic criminal released from prison.

public mind almost a shorthand expression for the genre as a whole. Her bankability made her a literary institution long before the end of her extended career; the success of her brand with the reading and theater-going public made critical appraisal of her work largely moot.

The Ackroyd Controversy Christie first drew critical attention with The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, which created a sensation upon its publication in 1926. Christie's choice to make the novel's narrator the murderer inspired vitriolic criticism from some reviewers—the London News Chronicle called it a "tasteless and unforgivable let-down by a writer we had grown to admire." Other critics heaped extravagant praise on Christie for pulling off this narrative coup. British mystery writer Dorothy L. Sayers, a rival of Christie's, defended her in the controversy. Roger Ackroyd certainly helped establish Christie's name among the reading public, and in retrospect, it is considered one of her finest works. The prominent literary critic Edmund Wilson later attacked the genre as a whole with his controversial 1945 article in the New Yorker, "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" Apparently, many people did.

Such books as Murder on the Orient Express, The A. B. C. Murders, and Ten Little Indians have been

especially singled out by critics as among Christie's best work and indeed, among the finest examples of the mystery genre. The literature available on Christie's life and work is extensive, from armchair companions on her fictional characters, through numerous biographies and autobiographies, to more recent academic studies. Christie's body of work has been of particular interest to contemporary feminist theorists. Although her work is lacking in overt social commentary, her challenges to traditional constructions of class, race, gender, and age have led to a reconsideration of her popularity. Some detractors of her work point to her workmanlike style, the formulaic structure of her novels, and the stereotyped nature of some of her characters. There can be no doubt, however, that her ingenious and intricate narrative puzzles have brought enjoyment to millions of readers.

Responses to Literature

- 1. There have been many great detectives throughout literary times, yet Poirot stands out as being unique. How so? What features illustrate his uniqueness? How is he different from, say, Sherlock Holmes? What makes each of them classics in their own right?
- 2. Write a character study of Miss Marple. How does she meet, and/or subvert, conventional expectations of the detective hero?
- 3. Closely analyze the mechanics of plotting in one of Agatha Christie's novels. What techniques does she use to mislead the reader?
- 4. What insights into the class structure of British society can you gain from reading Agatha Christie?

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Winston Churchill

BORN: 1874, Oxfordshire, England DIED: 1965, London, England

NATIONALITY: British
GENRE: Nonfiction

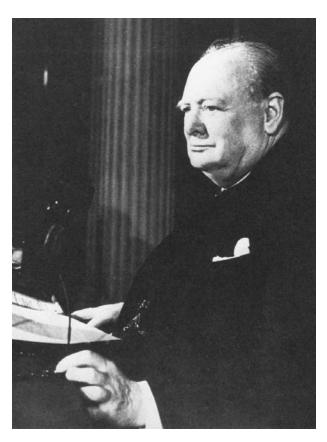
MAJOR WORKS:

Lord Randolph Churchill (1906) The World Crisis (1923–1931)

Marlborough: His Life and Times (1933–1938)

The Second World War (1948–1953)

A History of the English-Speaking Peoples (1956–1958)



Sir Winston Churchill Churchill, Winston, photograph.

Overview

Winston Churchill is best remembered as Britain's prime minister during World War II. He was also one of the century's outstanding historians, and received the Nobel Prize for Literature. In several multivolume works, including monumental histories of the two world wars, he revealed his vast knowledge of British history and intimate understanding of European political and military affairs.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Born into Privilege Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire—the home of his ancestor, the Duke of Marlborough—on November 30, 1874. His father, Lord Randolph Churchill, was a prominent parliamentarian, while his mother, born Jennie Jerome, was the daughter of an American millionaire.

Soldier and War Correspondent As a boy, Churchill was an undistinguished student with a speech impediment. Lord Randolph decided his son was destined for a military career. On his third attempt, Churchill passed the admission exam and entered the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, where he graduated with honors in 1894. He was then appointed to the Fourth (Queen's Own) Hussars as a sub-lieutenant.

Assigned to observe Spanish forces trying to contain a revolt in Cuba in 1895, he supplemented his military income by writing dispatches from the battle. Cuba was then a Spanish territory but had been fighting for independence for several decades. Cubans also resented the harsh policies Spain had put in place. The ongoing hostilities eventually resulted in the Spanish-American War of 1898, which won Cuba its freedom from Spain.

Churchill then participated in, and reported on, military campaigns in India and the Sudan. In India, then still a colony of Great Britain, Churchill was part of Sir Bindon Blood's punitive expedition to deal with the siege of a British garrison in the Malakand region by the local Pashtun tribal army. The Pashtun were upset by the division of their lands. In the Sudan, Churchill took part in the Sudan campaign of 1898, which saw numerous British, Egyptian, and Sudanese forces march together into the Sudan to again occupy and control the country for strategic purposes. His first two books—*The Story of the Malakand Field Force* (1898) and *The River War* (1899)—consist of revised reports from these expeditions.

Captivity Results in Popular Book and Political Career In a similar capacity, Churchill went to South Africa after the outbreak of the Boer War. The war was a conflict between the British Empire and the independent Boer countries of the Orange Free State and the South Africa Republic in which the British won control of the Boer territories. He was captured during the conflict in

November 1899. His dramatic escape from a Pretoria prison gained him a great deal of attention in England, as did his account of the event in his book *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (1900). His fame helped him secure election to Parliament in 1900, as a member of the Conservative Party. Since members of Parliament were not paid, Churchill's writing income facilitated his entrance into politics, beginning a career in public service that would last more than six decades.

His first major literary undertaking began in 1902, when the family trustees gave him his father's papers. The result was a two-volume biography, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (1906). An act of homage to a somewhat estranged parent, the biography is also a penetrating political study. Lord Randolph had tried, and failed, to move the Tories (Conservatives) toward social reform. Churchill decided to adopt his father's principles and in 1904 defected to the Liberal Party.

Successful Politician to Failed Military Leader From 1905 to 1915, Churchill held government positions, rising from undersecretary for the colonies to president of the board of trade, a cabinet office, then to home secretary. In the reform government of Lord Asquith between 1908 and 1912, Churchill sponsored progressive legislation such as old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, and national health insurance. His book Liberalism and the Social Problem (1909) provides the intellectual foundation for these domestic policies.

Churchill became First Lord of the Admiralty in 1911, and brilliantly retooled the British armed forces for the looming war. However, his career suffered a blow once World War I broke out after the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in 1914. Because of entangling alliances, nearly the whole of Europe became involved in the conflict, which saw massive devastation and heavy causalities where the war was fought. During the war, Churchill advocated for Britain and its allies to attack Turkey through the Dardanelles strait in an attempt to gain control of the strait and western Turkey. This strategy failed and produced many casualties in the battle, which took place at Gallipoli. As a result, Churchill was demoted and lost favor with his party. Resigning from the government in 1916, he spent several months commanding troops in the trenches of the Western Front in France. The prime minister, David Lloyd George, soon recalled him to become minister of munitions.

Churchill in The World Crisis After the war, Churchill returned to high office as secretary of state for war and secretary of state for air. He lost his seat in the House of Commons in 1922, but in 1924, he rejoined the Conservatives and was immediately named chancellor of the exchequer. Meanwhile, he had begun work on his first large-scale historical study, The World Crisis: 1911–1918, which examined World War I in six volumes (1923–1931). In the books, Churchill analyzes bloody battles in

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Churchill's famous contemporaries include:

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945): Austrian-born dictator of Nazi Germany, 1933–1945.

Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945): American president elected four times and serving from 1933 to 1945.

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970): British historian, philosopher, Nobel Prize–winning author, and political activist whose books include *Principles of Mathematics* (1903).

Charles A. Beard (1874–1948): American historian, known for his progressive interpretation of U.S. history in books such as *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927).

Albert Einstein (1879–1955): German-born physicist known for his theory of relativity, but who also wrote on humanitarian and political issues.

George Orwell (1903–1950): British novelist and essayist; author of the influential novel *1984*.

the military sphere and tense struggles in the political, writing in the vivid, if somewhat overblown, style of a master storyteller. As in his subsequent works, he is an active participant in the events he records, lending an element of personal narrative to his sweeping world history. Through his writing, he attempted to vindicate himself for his disgrace over the Dardanelles campaign.

From the Wilderness to the Summit The Conservative government went down to defeat in 1929. Churchill again became estranged from his party, and in the 1930s his political career reached a low point that he later called his "wilderness years." Out of office, he concentrated on writing, devoting five years of study to Marlborough (1933–1938), a four-volume biography of his distinguished forebear, an eighteenth-century military commander. He also drafted A History of the English-Speaking Peoples (1956–1958), for which he had received a large advance but which would not see publication until years later. Its four volumes chronicle the rise of the British Empire and the English-speaking world from the time of Julius Caesar to the First World War.

In *The Gathering Storm*, the first of his six volumes on the Second World War, Churchill describes himself as something of a lone voice calling for Britain to counter the growing threat of Nazi Germany. (After World War I, Germany had suffered an economic and identity crisis caused in part by the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles. In the early 1930s, Adolf Hitler gained power in part because he promoted the idea of a new, stronger Germany that sought to control much of Europe.) The truth is more ambiguous—Churchill praised some of

Nazi leader Hitler's qualities in print and in the House of Commons—but then his predictions were vindicated. When war broke out in September 1939 after Germany invaded Poland and Great Britain and other countries declared war on Germany, Churchill returned to the war cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty. The following May, Neville Chamberlain resigned as prime minister, and King George VI asked Churchill to lead a new administration.

In the early 1940s, it became clear that Churchill was the right leader for this dark moment in his nation's history as Nazi Germany gained control over more of Europe and began pounding Great Britain with bombs by air with the intent of taking it over as well. With steely resolve, while the nation was under attack, he declared that Britain's only objective was complete victory. His speeches in Parliament and on the radio offered the inspiration the country needed in the anxious months of the Blitz. He secured the aid—first economic, then military—of the United States and embraced the Soviet Union as a powerful European ally.

Later Career To end World War II in Europe, Churchill, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin orchestrated the Allied victory in Europe over Germany and Italy, which came in 1945. When the Russians marched into Berlin ahead of the Americans and British, Churchill had to face the reality of a great Communist power controlling part of Europe. He proposed to divide the continent into spheres of influence: Eastern Europe to the Soviets, Western Europe to Great Britain and America. The "Iron Curtain," as Churchill dubbed it, had fallen, and his decisions were largely responsible for the Cold War that followed.

While Churchill himself was extremely popular, the British public had not forgiven his party for supporting a policy of appeasement with Hitler. After a landslide victory for the Labour Party, Clement Attlee replaced Churchill as prime minister in July 1945, days before the atomic bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end the war in the Pacific. For the next six years, reduced to the minor roles of opposition leader and elder statesman, Churchill returned to the other part of his life's work. He wrote his six-volume history, *The Second World War*, which became a best seller on both sides of the Atlantic. The series interweaves a general history of the war with Churchill's recollections and analysis of military and diplomatic events he personally witnessed and directly influenced.

In 1951, Churchill returned to the prime minister's seat and served a relatively uneventful four-year term. In June 1953, he suffered a severe stroke, news of which was kept from the public. Later in 1953, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Essentially retired from the mid-1950s on, he only gave up his parliamentary seat in 1964. He died the following year at his home in London days after suffering another severe stroke.

Works in Literary Context

Winston Churchill's career as a historian coincided with his military and political roles. While his military education was formal, his historical training was self-acquired. He immersed himself in historical study while in India, reading steadily through the books his mother sent him. First came the volumes of Edward Gibbon and Thomas Babington Macaulay, which had an impact on his speeches and writing, followed by Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations, Plato's Republic, and Charles Darwin's Origin of Species. The influence of Darwin can be seen in Churchill's belief that life is a struggle in which the fit and courageous are most likely to survive.

The Personal Element A great deal of what Churchill wrote contains his personal views and interests. This includes not only his histories of the two world wars but also the biographies of his father and the Duke of Marlborough as well as his autobiographical writings, such as My African Journey (1908) and My Early Life (1930). His books of essays, Thoughts and Adventures (1942) and Great Contemporaries (1937), concern his adventures and the men he had known who made an impact upon him. Even A History of the English-Speaking Peoples serves as a vehicle for Churchill's ideas about politics, history, and tradition. His type of history is based on the personal element of his life.

Storytelling Churchill was mainly a storyteller. In his military histories, he uses short, breathless sentences to suggest the feeling of combat. His histories emphasize politics and wars because these were the subjects that interested him most and were most conducive to his penchant for lively narrative. He wrote in a conversational manner, creating the impression that he was talking to the reader—often because that was actually what he was doing, since he tended to dictate his work to others rather than write or type it himself.

Orality and Morality While Churchill's historical tomes are of lasting value, his achievements in political oratory have been still more influential. Many of his most memorable phrases—"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat"; "Never... was so much owed by so many to so few"; "the iron curtain"—have assumed a permanent place in our language and culture.

Another major legacy of Churchillian rhetoric is his vision of politics as a matter of morality, a struggle between right and wrong, between freedom and tyranny. He insisted that Hitler had to be confronted, not appeased; political leaders have been citing this lesson ever since as a justification for aggressive foreign policies.

Works in Critical Context

Churchill's early books, based on his war dispatches, brought him critical and financial success in England. The vigorous and colorful descriptions of military actions and the emphasis on the courage of British troops became

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Winston Churchill's histories of the First and Second World Wars are universally regarded as classic works of literature. Here are some other important historical accounts of the two world conflicts.

The Struggle for Europe (1952), by Chester Wilmot. An important military history of the Second World War in Europe, it was written by one of the principal reporters present at the D-Day landing.

The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (1960), by William Shirer. The first major history of Nazi Germany written in English, it is based largely on documents captured from German archives at the end of the war.

The Guns of August (1962), by Barbara Tuchman. An enormously influential and popular account of the origins and fateful first days of World War I by a popular American historian.

The Great War and Modern Memory (1975), by Paul Fussell. This brilliant work of intellectual history probes the ways that writers and artists responded to the First World War and thus shaped the modern understanding of that earth-shattering event.

A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II (1994), by Gerhard L Weinberg. A comprehensive history of the Second World War in a single volume, it illuminates the connections between far-flung events in the war's many theaters.

the hallmarks of his military books. Once he had established himself as a statesman, the success of his literary endeavors was assured. His six-volume *Second World War* sold in numbers unprecedented for a nonfiction work. Critics, however, have had a more mixed reaction to his work. Critics attribute some of the success of his writing to his habit of dictating his work. Many argue this helped to infuse his writing with the spirit of "fireside chats," thereby easily garnering public interest and sympathy.

Weaknesses as a Historian Churchill's histories have not been without their critics, both immediately after they were published and up to the present. He was an amateur historian, not academically trained. He tended to overdramatize events, and his works contained factual errors and questionable interpretations. His works were chockablock with primary documents, which made them longer than many felt was justified. Perhaps the most damning criticism made of his historical works is that they were self-serving—intended to justify his policy failures, such as the Dardanelles attack, or in the case of his biographies, to whitewash the reputations of his father and the Duke of Marlborough.

It is unlikely that many of Churchill's readers have been or are bothered by the shortcomings perceived by his critics. Many readers appreciate his remarkable ability to amass and organize huge quantities of information and to communicate it with eloquence and excitement. His writings remain highly popular, and their critical prestige has only grown with time. *The Second World War* has appeared on numerous lists of the greatest nonfiction works of the twentieth century. Even Churchill's detractors concede the immense historical value of this series, because of its author's proximity to the momentous events described.

The World Crisis Critics had a similar reaction to The World Crisis. Reviewing the book in 1927, John Freeman wrote in the London Mercury, "A petty scrutiny of his prose style would be inept and it is necessary to take a larger view, truly identifying the style with the whole man...Mr. Churchill's narrative is told in a way which satisfies the most exorbitant appetite. Every page is full of himself..."

Responses to Literature

- 1. How does Winston Churchill's biography of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, prefigure his own political career?
- 2. Write about the storytelling aspect of Churchill's prose, citing several examples.
- 3. In what ways do Churchill's political speeches and his historical narratives serve similar purposes? Write a paper in which you explain your views.
- 4. Churchill's history of the Second World War is both a memoir and a comprehensive narrative of a major world event. Evaluate how Churchill handles these dual purposes and how the author's personal voice affects the overall success of the work.
- 5. Write about literary and persuasive elements in one or two of Winston Churchill's classic speeches.

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Johnson Pepper Clark Bekederemo

BORN: 1935, Kiagbodo, Nigeria

NATIONALITY: Nigerian

GENRE: Poetry, drama, essays

MAJOR WORKS:

Song of a Goat (1961)

Poems (1961)

America, Their America (1964)

The Example of Shakespeare (1970)

A Decade of Tongues (1981)

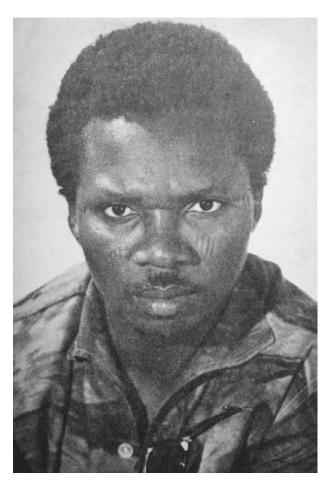
Overview

Nigerian-born J. P. Clark-Bekederemo has been called one of the central figures of West African drama, and he is equally respected as one of his country's foremost poets. In both roles, he combines classical Western style and structure with stories, characters, and themes rooted in his native Ijaw tradition to create a body of work that is both universal and culturally unique.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Nigeria: From Colony to Independent Nation When Clark-Bekederemo was born on April 6, 1935, Nigeria was a colony of the British Empire. The British government had designated Nigeria as a protectorate in 1901, though the varied cultural makeup of the region—along with the independent and nationalist nature of its people—led to increasing independence from Britain over the years, culminating in the country's formal establishment of independence in 1960. Because of the strong British influence in the region, Nigerians such as Clark-Bekederemo were immersed in a rich mix of both West African and European culture.

A Precocious Talent Clark-Bekederemo was one of many sons of the Ijaw chief Clark Fuludu Bekederemo of



J.P. Clark-Bekederemo Writer Pictures / drr.net

Kiagbodo in the western Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Perhaps due to the influence of his mother, Clark-Bekederemo had educational opportunities unusual for Kiagbodo children, who did not have a local grammar school. Clark-Bekederemo was christened Johnson Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, but upon the publication of Song of a Goat (1961) his name was shortened to John Pepper Clark by the designer of the cover. Clark-Bekederemo's subsequent publications used "John Pepper Clark" and "J. P. Clark" somewhat indiscriminately, until the publication of State of the Union, by "J. P. Clark-Bekederemo" in 1985. In his preface to that volume, Clark-Bekederemo wrote, "These works mark for me my assumption of my full family name, after waiting several years to do so jointly with my elder brothers. It is time to identify the man behind the mask so often misunderstood and speculated about."

Clark-Bekederemo emerged as a formidable force in Nigerian literature at an extremely young age. Both his first volume of poetry, *Poems*, and his first play, *Song of a Goat*, were written while he was a university undergraduate—and both are still studied and celebrated today. A novel he wrote while still in secondary school has never been published, and he abandoned fiction—not, it seems,

because he lacked talent, but because of his conviction that the novel and the Western short story, unlike poetry and drama, are alien to the African experience.

Clark-Bekederemo's earliest serious publication was in a journal called the *Horn*, which he and a small group of fellow students began in late 1957. In the poems Clark-Bekederemo has chosen to preserve from this early period (he has declined to republish many), three features recur: a basis in some occasion or concrete object (as, for example, the illness of his grandmother or a photograph in a magazine); imagery drawn from his home country or from a traditional story or belief; and intense fear or dissatisfaction. The imagery, of course, is not limited to the river country or mythology, nor is each occasion of each poem equally clear. But a sense of dissatisfaction is virtually omnipresent, sometimes as anxiety, sometimes as anger. His early major extended poem "Ivbie" is at times an outright cry of rage. It was originally published in *Poems*, was excerpted in A Reed in the Tide, and then reappeared complete in A Decade of Tongues (1981).

Recovering Traditions After he graduated with a BA in English from University College, Ibadan (UCI), in 1960, Clark-Bekederemo became a feature writer and editor for the Express newspaper in Lagos, began research into the traditions of the Ijaw people of the western Niger Delta, and also wrote a critical book about experiences he had had on an exchange at Princeton University (America, Their America, 1964). Then he accepted an academic position at the University of Lagos, where he first became professor of English and then served as head of the department until his retirement in 1980.

Since his undergraduate years at UCI, a dominant theme in Clark-Bekederemo's work has been the vitality of traditional life and art. He has devoted many years to recording, translating, adapting, and celebrating different traditional ways, while at the same time persistently critiquing colonial and postcolonial circumstances and external influences in Nigerian politics and affairs. Throughout, however, his has been an acutely personal art, expressive of a personal pain. In his earliest, most naive poetry, the personal was often obvious, leading Romanus N. Egudu to call "Grief, chaos, insecurity, and irredeemable loss" Clark-Bekederemo's "hallmarks" (in Four Modern West African Poets, 1977). In Clark-Bekederemo's later work, the immediacy and overwhelming quality of this personal pain shifted, to be replaced at times by an ironic detachment. Since his retirement from the University of Lagos in 1980, Clark-Bekederemo has held teaching appointments at various universities, including such prestigious schools as Yale and Wesleyan University in the United States. He is currently the director of the PEC Repertory Theatre in Lagos, which he and his wife, Ebun Odutola Clark, founded in 1981.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Clark-Bekederemo's famous contemporaries include:

Léopold Senghor (1906–2001): Senghor, a poet and cultural theorist of international repute, was better known as Senegal's first (and longest-serving) president after independence from France. Senghor remained in office from 1960 to 1980.

Lee Kuan Yew (1923–): Yew was the first prime minister of Singapore after the tiny island nation gained its independence in 1959.

Alain Badiou (1937–): One of the most prominent French thinkers of the late twentieth century, the Marxist-influenced Badiou is known for trying to develop an idea of "truth" that addresses the challenges of postmodernist and relativist philosophies.

George H. W. Bush (1924–): The forty-first president of the United States, Bush presided over the First Gulf War in 1991, which was the beginning of an intensification of United States military involvement in the Middle East. **Chinua Achebe** (1930–): Probably the best-known African author of the twentieth century, Achebe's most

can author of the twentieth century, Achebe's most famous novel is *Things Fall Apart* (1958). He is also a spokesman for a generation of literary critics, and his attack on Joseph Conrad's alleged racism in *Heart of Darkness* spurred great controversy among scholars of colonial and postcolonial literature.

Works in Literary Context

Negotiating the Linguistic Legacy of Colonialism Intellectually, a central concern of Clark-Bekederemo's art has been the use of an alien language, English, as a means of expressing indigenous African speech and thought. Like others of his generation, he has found himself constricted by his education in English. While still an undergraduate, he characterized himself in his poem "Ivbie" as the "bastard child" of two cultures (in Poems, 1962). To write as he and others similarly situated have done has required adaptation, a reconceptualization of the function of the artist. In an essay titled "The Legacy of Caliban" (in The Example of Shakespeare, 1970) Clark-Bekederemo defines the issue for the African writer by asking if the colonial subject (represented by Caliban) has "acquired just the right dose of language and technique to cope with his trade, to practise the art of Prospero" (the colonialist).

Clark-Bekederemo lays out three approaches African writers can take to producing art. He writes, "As the erector or assembler of an outfit that should act upon the reader as a catalyst, is [the artist] himself serving as the medium to the experiment, or should he merely

describe the process, or wholly leave the exercise to independent demonstrators to carry out? The first course entails the projection of the subject upon the screen of himself and consequently the production of a lyric piece. The second makes him something of a commentary man supplying a narrative. And the third leaves him completely out of the show, for then, having formulated what may be called a theoretical truth, the artist makes way for other experts to put it to the test, and the result is drama."

As Clark-Bekederemo goes on to imply, he has opted for all three courses, which are by no means discrete: "No work," he says, "is so impersonal that it does not at some point carry upon it the pressure of the personality of the author and none is so personal that it does not possess an independent life of its own." More personally, in "Aspects of Nigerian Drama" (in *The Example of Shakespeare*), he says of playwriting that "the task for the Ijaw...artist, writing in... English, is one of finding the verbal equivalent for his characters created in their original and native context."

Works in Critical Context

Critics have found ample evidence of Clark-Bekederemo's bifurcated background in his plays and poetry. They often note the presence of Ijaw myths, legends, and religion, masks, pantomimes, drumming, and dancing alongside poetic dialogue that seems distinctly Shakespearean, within epic tragedies styled after Sophocles or Euripides. Commenting in *English Studies in Africa*, T. O. McLoughlin observes, "The interesting point about John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo is that his awareness of what he calls 'traditional' and 'native' influences has come to dominate what he has learned from western literature."

From a High Point to a Low: Song of a Goat to The Masquerade Clark-Bekederemo's first dramatic work was the 1961 play Song of a Goat. In this play the fisherman Zifa's sexual impotence causes his wife, Ebiere, to seduce his younger brother, Tonye—on the advice of the Masseur, a doctor-mystic. Ultimately, Zifa walks into the sea to drown, and Ebiere is left pregnant, setting the stage for The Masquerade, Clark-Bekederemo's 1964 sequel to this tragic family drama.

African American playwright LeRoi Jones asserts in *Poetry* that *Song of a Goat* "is English, but it is not. The tone, the references... belong to what I must consider an African experience. The English is pushed...past the immaculate boredom of the recent Victorians to a quality of experience that is non-European, though it is the European tongue which seems to shape it, externally." Acknowledging that cultural background affects how an audience experiences *Song of a Goat*, Clark-Bekederemo once told a group of American students, "The idea of sacrifice is a universal one, but the theme of impotence is something that doesn't have the same kind of cultural significance for you as it has for me. The business of

reproduction, of fertility, is a life and death matter in my home area. If a man doesn't bear, he has not lived. And when he is dead, nobody will think of him."

The follow-up to Song of a Goat, The Masquerade, is a lyrical, fairy-tale tragedy that has been compared with Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. In the play Ebiere's son, Tufa, is a grown man who woos Titi, a popular village girl who has refused all other suitors. When the groom's family history is discovered, however, everyone, including the innocent Tufa, is shocked into nearly (or quite) insane behavior. Critic William Connor praises The Masquerade, saying, "I can think of no other modern play which in its compactness, the power of its tragic irony and the neatness of its resolution comes as close to duplicating the achievement of Clark-Bekederemo's models, the classical Greek tragedies." Nevertheless, the play has most frequently been dismissed by other critics as second-rate, having unbelievable storytelling, and as something that began in the playwright's mind as a classically modeled tragic trilogy but was never completed.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Research and discuss Clark-Bekederemo's role in founding the *Horn* magazine and in coediting the influential journal *Black Orpheus*. What do his editorial commitments suggest about his attitudes toward English as a language for African literature? How was his engagement in these projects influenced by his theoretical positions regarding English? Among other sources, you may wish to consider Clark-Bekederemo's own critical work, especially *The Example of Shakespeare*.
- 2. Consider several of what seem to be Ijaw traditions and themes in *Song of a Goat*. What comment, overall, does the play seem to be making about this cultural legacy and about its survival? Research the reception of the play. Consider the different critics who have praised and condemned Clark-Bekederemo for his fidelity to and bastardization of his own cultural history, respectively. What links can you draw between the message of the play and the conflicting messages in the criticism of the play? What does the play's overall cultural impact seem to have been, to date?
- 3. Compare two or three poems from Clark-Bekeder-emo's early collection of poetry, *Poems*, with two or three from a later collection, such as *A Decade of Tongues*. How do Clark-Bekederemo's themes and stylistic devices seem to have changed over time? What philosophical shifts do you think these changes represent in Clark-Bekederemo himself? Structure your response as a thesis-driven essay, in which you explore your argument with detailed and specific references and analysis of different poems.
- 4. Read one of Clark-Bekederemo's plays in the context of the genre of tragedy in general and of Shakespeare's tragedies in particular. In what ways does Clark-Bekederemo stay within the boundaries

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the themes Clark-Bekederemo has most frequently considered is the practice and ongoing legacy of colonialism: its linguistic and social impacts, both in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. As such, he is a writer of what is often termed postcolonial literature. Here are several important works of postcolonial literature by other authors:

The Hungry Tide (1960), a novel by Amitav Ghosh. This sixth novel by the Indian author puts the colonial legacy—as seen in a government with little or no interest in the welfare of its poorer citizens—in striking juxtaposition with the beauty, fragility, and danger of the Sundarbans, one of India's lushest and most complex ecosystems.

Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), a novel by Jean Rhys. Dominican author Rhys's most successful novel, this book deals with themes of racial inequality and displacement, setting itself up as a prequel—beginning in Jamaica—to Charlotte Brontë's 1847 Jane Eyre.

Things Fall Apart (1958), a novel by Chinua Achebe. Nigerian author Achebe's short masterpiece chronicles the life of Igbo leader Okonkwo, tracing the tragic influences of British colonialism and Christian missionaries on his ability to live a life that is meaningful.

marked out for this genre, and in what ways does he transgress those boundaries? Would you describe his plays as tragedies in the classic or Shakespearean sense? Why or why not? If yes, what does this suggest about Clark-Bekederemo as a Nigerian poet? If no, how would you classify the play?

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■ Samuel Clemens

See Mark Twain

BORN: 1889 Maisons-Laffitte, Paris DIED: 1963 Milly-la-Foret, France

NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Fiction, plays, poetry, screenplays

MAJOR WORKS:

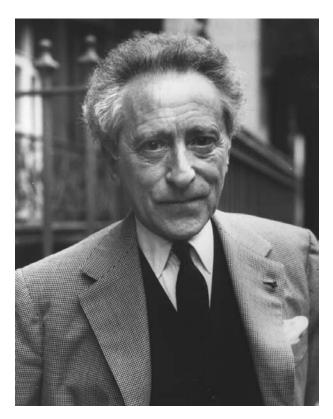
Les Enfants Terribles (1929) The Infernal Machine (1934) Beauty and the Beast (1946) Orpheus (1950)

Overview

Novels, poetry, lyrics, painting, movies, plays, and acting were all part of Jean Cocteau's artistry. A conversationalist, dandy, and outspoken public personality, he considered these elements of his life to be necessary to personal expression. Cocteau believed his art and his public life were inextricably bound. Like Oscar Wilde, he championed style in matters of great importance.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Wealthy Family Jean Cocteau was born on July 5, 1889, at Maisons-Lafitte, a suburb of Paris, to Georges and Eugénie Cocteau. He was brought up in a well-to-do



Jean Cocteau Cocteau, Jean, photograph. AP Images.

home frequented by notable artists of the day. He would be supported by family wealth through his youth and into his early forties.

The France of Cocteau's youth and most of his adulthood was known as the Third Republic, a democracy run by a parliament instead of a king or an emperor as had usually occurred in France's past. Though the Third Republic was relatively successful in terms of longevity—it lasted from 1870 until the German occupation of France in 1940—it was rarely considered ideal, which resulted in many different political groups vying for the support of the people and control of the government. This mix of political and philosophical ideas may have created the fertile environment in which Cocteau and his contemporaries flourished.

As a schoolboy at the Lycée Condorcet, Cocteau was anything but a model pupil, but he charmed his teachers with his verve and brilliance. His official debut as a writer was at the age of eighteen, when the renowned actor Édouard de Max gave a lecture on Cocteau's poetry. Cocteau soon visited Edmond Rostand, Anna de Noailles, and Marcel Proust; everybody and everything fashionable attracted him.

Surrealism and Scandal When the Russian ballet performed in Paris, Cocteau attended. Soon thereafter he proposed to director Sergei Diaghilev a ballet of his own.

The resulting *Blue God*, run in 1912, was not a success. Undaunted, Cocteau started the ballet *David*, for which he hoped Igor Stravinsky would do the music. Although that work did not materialize, *Potomak*, dedicated to Stravinsky, did get written, and texts composed for both works were finally incorporated in a ballet called *Parade*. Composer Erik Satie and artist Pablo Picasso collaborated with Cocteau on this production, for which Guillaume Apollinaire, in a program note, coined the word "surrealistic" (though Cocteau would defy any such categorization).

Parade debuted at the Théâtre du Châtelet on May 18, 1917. Some witnesses reported that the opening-night audience was scandalized; others claimed the public was unimpressed and indifferent. Whatever the case may have been, the production clearly proved unpopular, shutting down a week after opening. Although Diaghilev and others recognized Parade as original and exciting, it was not until the first revival in 1920 that it gained a wide appreciation. It was consistently performed in those ensuing years by the Ballets Russes in Paris, London, and across Europe.

Tragedy and Spectacle The period after World War I was a most productive time for Cocteau. In addition to theater work and poetry, he wrote his first novels, working them in tandem with two of Raymond Radiguet's. During this period he and Radiguet lived and worked together personally and professionally until, on a vacation to Toulon, Radiguet ate bad oysters, contracted typhoid, and died shortly after in Paris in 1923. Cocteau was so grief-stricken he was unable to attend the funeral.

During his time with Radiguet, Cocteau produced two spectacles for the Paris stage, one of which he conceived from a musical sketch provided by Darius Milhaud. It included the scenery of Fauvist painter Raoul Dufy titled *Le Boeuf sur le toit, or The Nothing Doing Bar* (1920)—comprised of "moving scenery" (actors with giant cardboard heads), a beheading, and a ballerina who, as she moves, smokes, drinks, and shakes the severed head "like a cocktail." The piece was a success, running for one hundred performances, a significant number for a ballet. More importantly for Cocteau's career, the spectacle established him as a serious collaborator for contemporary composers.

Mourning and Addiction After these early dance collaborations, Cocteau turned to ancient Greece for inspiration, producing a one-act version of Antigone (1922). However, still despondent over Radiguet's death, in January of 1924 he left Paris for Monte Carlo. There he met musicologist Louis Laloy, a meeting that marked a turning point in Cocteau's life: Laloy suggested opium might ease Cocteau's depression, and, while there is evidence Cocteau had tried opium before, during this period he became an addict. The rest of his life was punctuated by "cures" and relapses.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cocteau's famous contemporaries include:

Jean Anouilh (1910–1987): Surrealist playwright who, like Cocteau, explored the division between reality and ideality and is credited along with others for experimental theater.

Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948): Leader of the Indian independence movement and a spiritual founder of the Satyagraha philosophy.

Rear Admiral Grace Hopper (1906–1992): U.S. computer scientist who is considered a technological pioneer as one of the first Harvard Mark calculator programmers.

Edith Piaf (1915–1963): Popular French singer who sometimes collaborated with Cocteau.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980): French philosopher, writer, and critic associated with modern existentialism.

The Harshest Years In 1934 Cocteau wrote his last major play based on Greek mythology. The Infernal Machine (La Machine infernale, 1934), an adaptation of the Oedipus myth, is generally considered to be one of Cocteau's finest dramas.

The period between the composition of *The Infernal Machine* and the end of World War II is considered to be a low point in Cocteau's career as an artist. During this time his opium addiction grew more severe, and he began to have financial trouble. These events coincided with a move toward plays with greater commercial appeal. While critics found Cocteau's plays less original and less appealing, his fame continued to grow. Three more plays brought more attention, and a relationship with actor Jean Marais was Cocteau's saving grace.

The Restful Years The Knights of the Round Table (Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde, 1937) took Cocteau three years to get produced. In the interim, he earned money through journalism, and began a new project: a journalistic re-creation of Jules Verne's Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours (1872; Around the World in Eighty Days, 1873). Cocteau and friend Marcel Khill retraced the path of Phileas Fogg and Passepartout and in the process—on a Pacific steamer—ran into British actor and director Charlie Chaplin. Cocteau's writings about the trip were published in the newspaper Paris Soir (Paris Evening), then collected in the volume Round the World Again in Eighty Days (Mon premier voyage: Tour du monde en 80 jours, 1936).

Despite repeated "cures," Cocteau's opium addiction was at its worst. Marais attempted to rescue him from it. Marais abhorred opium and pressured Cocteau to give it

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of Cocteau's most famous works was the 1950 film *Orpheus*, a modern version of the Greek myth of Orpheus, a young musician who travels to the underworld to rescue his beloved Eurydice, but fails. Many artists, musicians, and writers have been fascinated by the myth of Orpheus and the general idea of reclaiming a dead loved one. Other works that treat this theme include:

Orpheus in the Underworld (1858), a comic opera by Jacques Offenbach. This popular opera stands apart from other interpretations of the Orpheus myth by virtue of its riotous humor. The opera features the well-known "Can-Can" tune.

Black Orpheus (1959), a film directed by Marcel Camus. This winner of the Cannes Film Festival Palme D'Or and an Academy Award for best foreign film is a modern retelling of the Orpheus myth set in the African-American community in Rio di Janeiro, Brazil.

"Orpheus and Eurydice" (2002), a poem by Czeslaw Milosz. In his last published poem, Milosz contemplates the death of his wife and the pain of loss.

The Amber Spyglass (2000), a novel by Philip Pullman. In this last book of the His Dark Materials fantasy trilogy, the young heroine Lyra (seemingly named after the lyre, the musical instrument Orpheus played) travels to an underworld drawn from Greek myth and leads its inhabitants out.

up, though Cocteau never did so entirely. During their time together Marais also inspired Cocteau to create plays and movies for him to star in. These included visually inventive versions of classic tales such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1946) and *Orpheus* (1950), both widely considered by film critics to be cinematic masterpieces.

Cocteau spent the last thirteen years of his life in semiretirement on the French Riviera, after charming wealthy patroness Francine Weissweiller, who invited Cocteau and his last companion, Edouard Dermithe, to live with her at her villa in Saint Jean Cap Ferrat. Cocteau decorated the house, engaged in several municipal projects, wrote less, and produced only one more work, the movie *Le Testament d'Orphée* (1959), which was partially financed by French filmmaker François Truffaut. It received mostly negative reviews.

Yet Cocteau was also celebrated in his final years. He was elected to the Académie française (The French Academy), and received an honorary doctorate at Oxford. He was knighted, becoming a Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur (Knight of the Legion of Honor) in 1949, and was made a member of the Belgian Académie Royale de Langue

et de Littérature françaises (Belgian Royal Academy of French Literature and Language). When he died October 11, 1963, he was widely mourned.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Although Cocteau refused to classify himself as belonging to any literary movement, his early career was greatly influenced by surrealism and Dadaism. However, surrealists such as André Breton disdained Cocteau's dandyism and refused to take him seriously. In fact, Breton became one of Cocteau's harshest critics throughout the 1920s, instigating Cocteau's constant need to justify himself to his peers, critics, and public.

Style Cocteau's attention to style served him well in all areas of artistic production, but most notably in the theater. In a career as a dramatist that spanned forty years, Cocteau wrote plays set in such disparate locales as ancient Greece, King Arthur's court, and contemporary Paris. Throughout these plays, there is an emphasis on the status of the play as an event rather than as a text. Further, Cocteau was a contemporary of Antonin Artaud, who played the role of Tiresias in the first production of Cocteau's Antigone and who shared what appears to be a mutual influence of dramatic practice and thought. In the 1920s and 1930s, he was experimenting in the ways that Artaud later proposed in his essay Theater and Its Double ("Le Théâtre et son double") (1938).

In the theater, as in most of his artistic endeavors, Cocteau was part of the avant-garde. Yet, after an initial period of dramatic rule-breaking, Cocteau began writing plays that conformed more closely to the standards established by traditional French dramaturgy. This change of approach may have made his later plays more palatable to the audiences of his day, but most are no longer performed.

Impact Cocteau insisted he be called "poet" above all, believing poets existed in a realm removed from politics, a theory that was beneficial to his art but that led to criticism for some of his actions during World War II. He called his dramaturgy "poésie de théâtre" (Theater Poetry) and his novels "poésie de roman" (Novel Poetry), but remained wary of labels that would limit his capacity as an artist. This concern is one of the reasons he never allied himself with any of the major artistic movements of his day. Yet, as an important innovator of what Guillaume Apollinaire termed "surrealism," he had significant influence on other artists, including the group of composer friends in Montparnasse known as Les Six. Again, however, Cocteau denied being part of any such movement.

Works in Critical Context

Cocteau was a true visionary, producing innovative works in more genres than any other single artist of the twentieth century. But his career as a dramatist was uneven. Some of the characters of Cocteau's later works reveal interesting aspects of human psychology, but they generally inhabited untidy plots that prevented critical success. One reason for the sloppiness of Cocteau's drama was that he had shifted his attention to cinema, winning such prizes as those at the 1950 Venice Film Festival and the 1951 Cannes Film Festival. Thus, while his later theatrical pieces are widely dismissed, he added universally acclaimed motion pictures to his list of artistic achievements, left an enduring legacy built upon his revolutionary contributions to ballet, spectacle, and drama, and had an important and lasting effect on the dramatic arts in France and around the world.

While several of his works have earned greater recognition with time, some are considered his finest, among them *The Infernal Machine*.

The Infernal Machine Based on Greek mythology, this adaptation of the Oedipus myth directed by the famous Louis Jouvet and set-designed by Christian Bérard was widely praised by critics. Francis Fergusson, in a 1949 lecture at Princeton (published in book form in 1950), calls the play "at one and the same time chic and timeless-rather like the paintings of Picasso's classic period, or his illustrations for [Roman poet] Ovid." Neal Oxenhandler, writing in 1984, offers a more modern view of the play's enduring quality: "In the age of nuclear threat, mass murder, and terrorism, Cocteau's Infernal Machine remains wholly contemporary. It is a play for all time." Although it is not the most oft-performed Cocteau theatrical work—that honor probably goes to The Human Voice—The Infernal Machine remains his most highly praised play.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Cocteau often insisted on defying categorization. Yet he is known as one of the eminent surrealist writers of his time. Visit the Web site of a major metropolitan museum. Look at surrealist art such as that of Salvador Dalí, Giorgi De Chirico, or Max Ernst. Discuss with others what you find to be surrealist about their work (or a particular work). Then, find as many incidences of surrealism as you can in Cocteau's work. For example, what is dreamlike in his writing? Discuss with others, so that you might each point out something the others in the group did not see and so you can collectively come up with your own understanding of surrealism.
- 2. Why does Cocteau's Oedipus seem to have so many more faults or flaws than Sophocles's Oedipus? Why do you think Cocteau made Oedipus so prone to error?
- 3. Considering Cocteau's opium addiction, research opium production and use (or abuse) in the early twentieth century. Was Cocteau alone in his addiction? Did others use opium for depression, as a

- medicine, or for other purposes? If so, how did they use opium for physical and psychological purposes?
- 4. Using your library and the Internet, find out more about the culture of post–World War I Paris. Select a prominent artistic figure of this period, and write a short biographical article on that person.

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Mandrei Codrescu

BORN: 1946, Sibiu, Romania NATIONALITY: Romanian

GENRE: Poetry, fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

License to Carry a Gun (1970)

The History of the Growth of Heaven (1971)
The Life and Times of an Involuntary Genius

(1975)

Comrade Past and Mister Present (1986)



Andrei Codrescu Photograph by Brian Baiamonte. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

Andrei Codrescu is a Romanian-born American novelist, poet, editor, and radio commentator. Noted for his command of everyday American English in his writings, Codrescu writes spare, forthright poetry noted for its exacting language and imagery and playful, irreverent wit. His poetry, which reveals the influences of the Dadaist and Surrealist movements, has been likened to the works of Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams for its replication of American vernacular.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Youth in Communist Romania Born Andrei Ivanovitch Goldmutter on December 20, 1946, in Sibiu, Romania, Codrescu was raised in the turbulent political atmosphere that followed World War II. By the end of the war, Romania was fighting with the Allies against Germany, but because it was under the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, it became a Communist country led by Premier Petru Groza. As part of the Soviet-

influenced Eastern bloc, Romania was Communist and followed a pro-Soviet agenda. Codrescu began writing poetry at the age of sixteen and continued to do so while attending the University of Bucharest, where he changed his named to Codrescu. He became involved with his country's literary intelligentsia prior to publishing several poems critical of Romania's Communist government.

Escape to the West Expelled from the University of Bucharest for his criticism of the Communist government, Codrescu fled his homeland before being conscripted into the army. Traveling to Rome, the young writer learned to speak fluent Italian and earned his master's degree from the University of Rome. He then went to Paris and finally to the United States with his mother.

Arriving in America in 1966 without any money or knowledge of English, Codrescu was nonetheless impressed with the social revolution that was occurring around the country as Americans changed how they looked at themselves, each other, and the world. At this time, there was a strong call for increased individual rights, including the civil rights movement, which sought to increase equitable treatment for African Americans and a burgeoning feminist movement that wanted rights for women. There was also a powerful antiwar movement protesting American involvement in the on-going Vietnam War.

Poetry Influenced by Life in America As Village Voice contributor M. G. Stephens relates, Codrescu quickly "hooked up with John Sinclair's Artist Workshop. Within four years he learned to speak American English colorfully and fluently enough to write and publish his first poetry collection, License to Carry a Gun (1970). The collection was hailed by many critics who recognized Codrescu as a promising young poet.

Codrescu then published his acclaimed second collection of poetry *The History of the Growth of Heaven* (1971), and followed it with two books of autobiographical prose, *The Life and Times of an Involuntary Genius* (1975) and *In America's Shoes* (1983). In the early 1980s, Codrescu was also influential in that he founded the literary journal *Exquisite Corpse* and became a weekly commentator on *All Things Considered*, a popular show on National Public Radio. The same year, he published a collection of his broadcast essays *Craving for Swan* (1986), he published *Comrade Past and Mister Present*, a highly regarded collection of prose, poetry, and journal entries.

Return to Romania Codrescu returned to Romania after twenty-five years to observe firsthand the 1989 revolution, which shook dictator Nicolai Ceauşescu from power. Ceauşescu had gained power in the early 1960s, and while a Communist, moved the country away from Soviet influence over the next few decades. However, the dictator ruled his country with an iron fist and was not open to reform. A popular uprising removed Ceauşescu

from power with the help of Romania's army, and he and his family were executed. The range of emotions Codrescu experienced during this time, from exhilaration to cynicism, are described in the volume *The Hole in the Flag: A Romanian Exile's Story of Return and Revolution* (1991).

Initially enthusiastic over the prospects of a new political system to replace Ceauşescu's repressive police state, Codrescu became disheartened as neo-Communists, led by Ion Iliescu, co-opted the revolution in the early 1990s. Though he agreed to ban the Communist Party and institute reform, Iliescu himself exhorted gangs of miners to beat student activists "who represented to Codrescu the most authentic part of the revolution in Bucharest," according to Alfred Stepan in the *Times Literary Supplement*. "It seemed to him the whole revolution had been a fake, a film scripted by the Romanian Communists." As Codrescu wrote of his impression and opinions of his mother country in the book, Romania remained unstable, marred by civil unrest and corruption, and economically impoverished for at least the next decade.

Continued Literary Career in the United States In preparation for his 1993 book and documentary film Road Scholar: Coast to Coast Late in the Century, Codrescu drove across the United States in a red Cadillac accompanied by photographer David Graham and a video crew. Encountering various aspects of the American persona in such cities as Detroit and Las Vegas, Codrescu filtered his experiences through a distinctively wry point of view. "Codrescu is the sort of writer who feels obliged to satirize and interplay with reality and not just catalogue impressions," observed Francis X. Clines in the New York Times Book Review, who compared Codrescu's journey with the inspired traveling of 1950s "road novelist" Jack Kerouac.

While Codrescu continued to publish poetry volumes such as Alien Candor: Selected Poems, 1970–1995 (1996) and It Was Today—New Poems by Andrei Codrescu (2003) as well as several collections of essays, including The Muse Is Always Half-Dressed in New Orleans (1995), the author branched out into other literary genres. He published his first novel in 1995, the Gothic thriller The Blood Countess, and a collection of short stories in 1999, A Bar in Brooklyn: Novellas and Stories, 1970–1978.

The novel drew on both his Eastern European background as well as his life in the United States. The title of *The Blood Countess* refers to Elizabeth Bathory, a sixteenth-century Hungarian noblewoman notorious for bathing in the blood of countless murdered girls. Codrescu tells Bathory's gruesome story alongside a contemporary narrative about the countess's descendant, Drake Bathory-Kereshtur, a U.S. reporter of royal lineage working in Budapest who meets up with various manifes-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Codrescu's famous contemporaries include:

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997): Best remembered in popular culture for his role as a poet in the 1950s Beat generation, Ginsberg wrote the poem "Howl."

Nicolai Ceauşescu (1918–1989): Leader of Romania from 1965 to 1989, he was deposed during the widespread revolutions that swept Eastern Europe that year.

Mikhail Gorbachev (1931–): Russian politician, winner of the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize, Gorbachev was the last head of state of the Soviet Union. His program of reforms and his efforts to reach out to Western leaders contributed to the end of the Cold War.

Bob Dylan (1941–): American singer-songwriter, poet, and author, Dylan first made his mark as a highly influential folksinger in the early 1960s. His lyrics and musical explorations blazed a trail for a generation of musicians.

Robert Bly (1926–): American poet and author, he was best known for his involvement in the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, a self-help movement based on the writings of Joseph Campbell.

tations of Elizabeth before he is seduced by her spirit to commit murder.

An English professor at Louisiana State University, Codrescu also continues to contribute to National Public Radio program *All Things Considered*.

Works in Literary Context

Codrescu writes spare, forthright poetry noted for its exacting language and imagery and playful, irreverent wit. His subject matter is largely autobiographical, often consisting of recollections of his youth in Communist Romania and his experiences as an expatriate living in Rome, Paris, and the United States. Codrescu eschews controversy in favor of a mock-revolutionary pose and a disillusioned yet resistant attitude. He is frequently commended for perceptive insights into American culture as viewed from a foreigner's perspective.

Oppression Although Codrescu enjoys the freedoms that exist in the United States, he is still as critical of bureaucracy in his adopted country as he was in his native Romania—a skepticism that is made evident in his poetry and his autobiographies, *The Life and Times of an Involuntary Genius* and *In America's Shoes.* The author uses his poetry and essays to focus on the idea of oppression, something which he fearlessly confronts.

Cultural Differences Just as Comrade Past and Mister Present compares East and West through poetry, in The Disappearance of the Outside: A Manifesto for Escape

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Codrescu uses his unique outsider perspective to make keen observations on the spirit of America in his poetry through the use of contemporary speech and keen insight. Other works by poets and novelists to explore similar themes include:

Leaves of Grass (1855), by Walt Whitman. A lifelong project first published in 1855 and revised several times, this collection of poetry was highly controversial when first released due to its thematic focus on the sensual world and its natural use of language.

Pictures from Brueghel, and Other Poems (1962), by William Carlos Williams. An American modernist poet, Williams wrote in a style influenced by Walt Whitman, utilizing the idiomatic language of the everyday person in his search for what he called "the American grain."

On the Road (1957), by Jack Kerouac. One of the leading lights of the Beat generation, Kerouac wrote this stream of consciousness travelogue of America in the early 1950s

Ham on Rye (1982), by Charles Bukowski. Known for his gritty, street-level poetry and prose, Bukowski wrote this semiautobiographical novel about growing up in Los Angeles during the Great Depression. The book is filled with realistic, almost crude dialogue and characters, earning it comparisons with *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Codrescu discusses the matter in direct prose. He addresses such subjects as the mind-numbing effects of television and mass marketing, the sexual and political implications that are a part of language, and the use of drugs and alcohol in contrasting life in both parts of the world.

Works in Critical Context

Although Codrescu's earliest poems caused his expulsion from the University of Bucharest, critical reception in the West has been generally favorable. From the publication of his first poetry collection, he has been considered a rising talent. His self-denigrating sense of humor, his keen insight on contemporary culture, and his mastery of American idiom in his essays and memoirs have also won him accolades. According to Thomas A. Wassmer in Best Sellers, Codrescu is now "considered by many writers to be one of this country's most imaginative poets, with talents similar to those of Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams." His 1995 debut novel, The Blood Countess, was warmly received and described as being "beautifully written and meticulously researched."

Codrescu's Poetry Echoing this comparison with Whitman and Williams, a Choice critic attests that like

these American writers, Codrescu "writes poems as if no one had written one before," but unlike them he is more interested in the "introspective, internal." John R. Carpenter, in a *Poetry* review, notes that the poet "gains in spontaneity, but loses in participation; the freshness is specialized."

Another feature of Codrescu's poetry is his unique perspective and interest in American English. His "greatest strength," asserts *New York Times Book Review* contributor John Krich, "lies in his outsider's appreciation for the succulence of American idioms. Where language is reinvented daily on billboards, it offers liberation from the chains of connotation."

"In line with his literary modernism," writes Josephine Woll in the *Washington Post Book World*, "[Codrescu's] tastes run to the whimsical, the surreal (about which he writes with great understanding), even the perverse. He means to provoke, and he does. His ideas are worth thinking about." Codrescu's skill as an observant commentator about life in America has led critics like Wassmer to conclude that Codrescu has given his audience "a clearer penetration into the soul of America by a foreigner than any by a native American poet."

The Blood Countess While some reviewers comment on the horrific aspects of The Blood Countess, Bettina Drew points out in the Washington Post Book World that "Codrescu has done more than tap into a Western fascination, whipped up by Hollywood Draculas and vampires....He has written a vivid narrative of the sixteenth century...[and] has made the history of Hungary and its shifting contemporary situation entertaining and compelling."

Although Robert L. McLaughlin observes in the American Book Review that The Blood Countess's "historical foundation is interesting; the incidents of its parallel plots keep one turning the pages; it has much to say about our world." R. Z. Sheppard observes in Time that "The Blood Countess offers stylish entertainment" while Entertainment Weekly contributor Margot Mifflin finds the book "beautifully written and meticulously researched."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Although Codrescu has lived in the United States for most of his adult life, he still holds strong opinions on eastern European literature. Using past interviews and essays, research Codrescu's views on the literature of his homeland and neighboring countries and write a paper analyzing your findings.
- 2. Examine old copies of Codrescu's literary magazine *Exquisite Corpse*. Is there a theme or pattern to the types of poems published in the magazine? How do you think Codrescu has influenced the magazine as editor? Create a presentation of your findings.

- 3. Compare Codrescu's New Orleans stories with those of another author who sets his or her stories in that city—such as Anne Rice—in a presentation. How do the portrayals of the city differ between the two? What elements of life in New Orleans does each author highlight?
- 4. Listen to some of Andre Codrescu's National Public Radio dispatches and compare them to his essays in a paper. How does his spoken-word work differ from his written work? What stylistic changes does he make to his language? Do you think his spoken or written work is more effective? Why?

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Paulo Coelho

BORN: 1947, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

NATIONALITY: Brazilian

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

The Pilgrimage (1987)

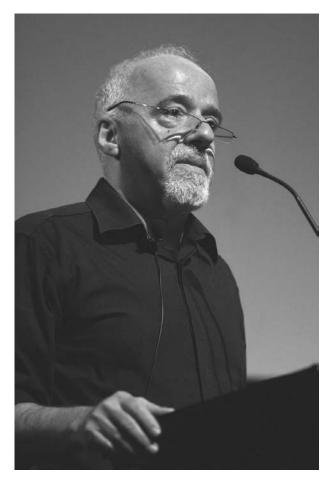
The Alchemist (1988)

The Gift (1991)

Veronika Decides to Die (1998)

Overview

Brazilian author Paulo Coelho has penned several books that have been translated into English and numerous other languages. They include *The Diary of a Magus: The Road to Santiago* and *The Alchemist.* According to a reviewer writing in the *Economist*, Coelho's "stories are packed with proverbs, parables and advice (or 'sharings' as he prefers) that resemble entries in a New Age self-help manual: pursue your dreams, resist temptation, banish 'negative thoughts,' listen to your heart."



Paulo Coelho Gareth Cattermole / Getty Images

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Troubled Youth Coelho was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1947. He was raised to be a devout Catholic, and this strictness could be partly responsible for his seeking other forms of spirituality. In addition, he was raised to be a lawyer, but he decided relatively early on to pursue other interests.

As a young man, Coelho was committed to mental hospitals on three occasions by his parents, who did not understand their son's wish to become an artist. In his novel *Veronika Decides to Die*, Coelho questions his involuntary commitment. His protagonist, twenty-four and working in a library in Ljubljana, Slovenia, despairs over her inability to make changes in her life and the world. She overdoses on sleeping pills in a suicide attempt and finds herself in Villette, the infamous asylum for the insane. As Veronika meets other patients and becomes aware of their diagnoses and treatments, she questions the definitions of mental illness and the use of drugs to alter people who fall outside descriptions of what is considered normal. Following the original publication of the book in Brazil, new laws were put in place to restrict involuntary commitment. In 1998,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Coelho's famous contemporaries include:

Elena Poniatowska (1932–): Mexican author and journalist best known for her work commemorating the 1968 massacre in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Mexico City.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986): Coelho based *The*Alchemist on this famous Argentine writer's *Tale of Two*Dreamers

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–): Nobel Prize–winning Colombian novelist and magic realist writer.

Raul Seixas (1945–1989): Popular Brazilian songwriter who collaborated with Coelho.

with book sales exceeding twenty-seven million in over one hundred countries, Coelho became the second-best-selling author worldwide.

Wide-Ranging Interests Coelho has worked as a journalist, a director, and a songwriter. He wrote many songs but is most famous for those written with musician Raul Seixas in the seventies. In addition to his jobs and creative endeavors, Coelho has traveled a great deal, most notably on the lengthy, ancient Spanish Road to Santiago, which he writes about in *The Pilgrimage*.

Brazil was transformed from a democracy into a military dictatorship following a coup in 1964 and remained a dictatorship until 1985. Coelho was imprisoned (and reportedly tortured) in 1974 for antigovernment activities, including his musical collaborations with Seixas and their unconsummated plans for an anarchistic society. He was a recording executive in the late 1970s, first for Polygram, then CBS, and he founded the Instituto Paulo Coelho, a nonprofit organization to help underprivileged Brazilians, with his wife, Christina Oiticica, in 1996. He is currently an adviser to UNESCO and active on the Web and in film. He and his wife split their time between Brazil and France.

Works in Literary Context

Journeys The Alchemist concerns the journey of a young Spanish shepherd to Egypt. As his odyssey progresses, the shepherd undergoes a spiritual transformation and receives advice from various old sages, gypsies, desert people, and an alchemist he encounters. Coelho used the short tale Thousand and One Nights to lead him, as he explained in a UNESCO Courier interview: "I took four guiding ideas from it: the personal legend, the language of signs, the soul of the world, and the need to listen to one's heart." Coelho also remarked on the

journey of writing the book: "The rest was vague, like being in a fog. The only thing I knew was that the boy would eventually return to his starting point."

Obsessions Coelho calls upon his interest in the spiritual world in The Zahir: A Novel of Obsession. In Arabic, the title word means "the obvious" or "unable to go unnoticed"; essentially an object that inspires fanatical focus and pursuit, or obsession. The novel revolves around a writer whose wife has disappeared with someone who is most likely her lover. The writer's search to find out exactly what happened to his wife takes him from Paris to Kazakhstan, but it is in reality a journey of selfdiscovery as he learns that he really can never find his wife until he finds himself. In an interview for HarperCollins, Coelho explains the emotional difference between reaching for a personal goal and becoming fixated on an object, fantasy, or idea: "If you pursue your dreams as Santiago did in *The Alchemist*, you are enjoying each step. But if you are searching for the Zahir, not only you do not arrive there, but your life will be full of anxiety."

Works in Critical Context

Despite being a favorite of readers, Coelho often endures criticism from reviewers, who, as one *Economist* contributor noted, "denounce him as a charlatan, a bore, a seller of snake oil." Although critics recognize readers' interest in Coelho's ideas, they often fault his writing.

The Alchemist The Alchemist did not receive widespread critical attention in the United States, although the novel did garner some favorable reviews. School Library Journal contributor Sabrina Fraunfelter commented that "this simple, yet eloquent parable celebrates the richness of the human spirit." A reviewer asserted in Publishers Weekly that the book "has the comic charm, dramatic tension and psychological intensity of a fairy tale." Booklist contributor Brad Hooper noted: "Beneath this novel's compelling story and the shimmering elegance with which it's told, lies a bedrock of wisdom about following one's heart."

Veronika Decides to Die "Employing his trademark blend of religious and philosophical overtones," wrote a Publishers Weekly contributor, "Coelho focuses on his central question: why do people go on when life seems unfair and fate indifferent?" The reviewer added that Veronika Decides to Die "will appeal to readers who enjoy animated homilies about the worth of human existence."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Look up the definition of *new age* and write a twoto three-page essay describing how this term applies to a particular work you have read by Coelho. Use specific examples from the text to support your ideas.
- 2. Read Borges's *Tale of Two Dreamers* and *The Alchemist*. Write a six- to seven-page essay exploring how Borges's work seems to have inspired *The*

- *Alchemist.* Use specific examples from each text to illustrate your findings.
- 3. With a few of your classmates, come up with a list of books, such as *Veronika Decides to Die*, that have helped shaped policy or alter laws and trends. You may use resources from the Internet or your library to aid in your search.
- 4. Write an informal essay explaining how a particular piece of Coelho's fiction, like *The Alchemist*, can be viewed as nonfiction. Discuss how seeing the messages or themes in the book as conveying "truth" affects the reader differently than seeing those same messages or themes as mere authorial creations.

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COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Coelho explores the theme of humankind's spirituality and quest for alternate forms of faith and knowledge. Here are some other works that emphasize some people's search for wisdom via mystical means and physical journeys:

The Dharma Bums (1958), a novel by Jack Kerouac. In this novel, the famous Beat writer chronicles his journey to a remote mountain, where he finds peace and wisdom in solitude.

The Teachings of Don Juan (1968), a book by Carlos Castaneda. This controversial novel/memoir claims to be about the author's journey with a knowledgeable shaman

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (1974), a novel by Robert M. Pirsig. In this novel, the narrator and his son question the nature of reality and delve into metaphysics while on a cross-country motorcycle trip.

BORN: 1940, Cape Town, South Africa

NATIONALITY: South African

GENRE: Fiction, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

In the Heart of the Country (1977) Waiting for the Barbarians (1980)

Life and Times of Michael K (1983)

Foe (1987)

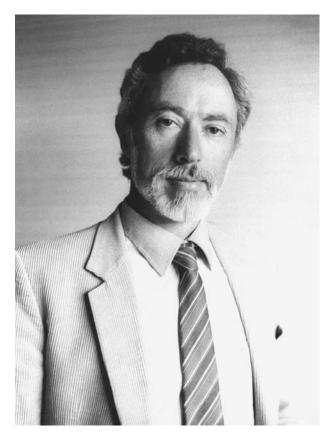
Disgrace (1999)

Overview

Widely regarded as one of South Africa's most accomplished contemporary novelists, Coetzee examines the effects of racism, oppression, and fear. While addressing the brutalities and contradictions associated with the South African policy of apartheid, Coetzee writes from an apolitical viewpoint that extends beyond geographic and social boundaries to achieve universal significance. This effect is enhanced through his use of such literary devices as allegory, unreliable narrators, and symbolic settings.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Growing Up in Cape Town John Maxwell Coetzee was born in Cape Town, South Africa, on February 9, 1940, to an attorney father and a schoolteacher mother. He spent most of his childhood in Cape Town and



J.M. Coetzee Coetzee, J.M., photograph by Jerry Bauer. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Worcester—a period of his life that he recalls in his autobiographical work *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997). A section of *Boyhood* is devoted to the holidays that Coetzee spent as a child on his uncle's farm in the Karoo, the semidesert region of the Cape Province. In all probability, his perennial fascination with the primeval aspect of the South African landscape stems from his boyhood visits to this region, which forms the main setting of his novel *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983).

Coetzee's parents were *bloedsappe*, Afrikaners who supported General Jan Smuts and dissociated themselves from the Afrikaner nationalist movement that eventually came to power in South Africa in 1948. Afrikaners are the descendants of Dutch colonists who settled in South Africa in the seventeenth century, and fought for territory and power against indigenous Africans as well as rival British colonists until their 1940s political victory. When they took power, the Afrikaner-based National Party began implementing the policy of apartheid, which legally separated people by color.

Although Coetzee came from an Afrikaans-speaking background, he attended various English middle schools and, after graduating from a Roman Catholic boys' school in 1956, went on to study English literature and mathematics at the University of Cape Town, receiving

his BA in 1960 and MA in 1963. This bilingual upbringing has enabled Coetzee to depict English- and Afrikaans-speaking characters in his fiction with equal skill—an uncommon occurrence in South African literature, which, as part of the legacy of a divided society, usually is riddled with ethnic stereotypes.

Life Abroad Having found his studies tedious at the University of Cape Town, particularly in English, Coetzee left South Africa for England in 1962 to pursue a career as a computer programmer, working for International Business Machines (IBM) for two years and then for International Computers from 1964 to 1965. Coetzee completed his master's thesis in 1963 and married Philippa Jubber the same year; the couple had two children, Nicolas, born in 1966, and Gisela, born in 1968. Evidently, computer programming did not prove rewarding, and he left after fours years. Under a Fulbright exchange program, Coetzee went to the United States and commenced work on a doctoral thesis in English at the University of Texas at Austin.

The time Coetzee spent at the University of Texas crucially influenced his development as a novelist. His doctoral research on the fiction of Samuel Beckett, for example, made a definite impression, as is evident in his use of minimalist scenarios and a limited number of characters. Moreover, in Texas, Coetzee first encountered reports and accounts of the Khoi people, written by early European explorers, travelers, and missionaries in South Africa. These documents provided the germ for his first work, the novellas of Dusklands (1974). Another important influence from this period on his writing was the Vietnam War, which reached its height during his stay in the United States. The war affected Coetzee deeply, and, besides prompting him to take part in an antiwar demonstration (for which he was arrested), it impelled him to make a comparison of U.S. imperialism and South African colonialism.

International Success Coetzee stayed in the United States while writing his dissertation, which he completed in 1969. As an assistant professor, he taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo from 1968 to 1971. Dusklands was published two years after Coetzee's return to South Africa, where he took up a lecturing position in English at the University of Cape Town in 1972 before becoming a full professor in 1982. Apartheid continued to be a powerful force in South Africa, though there was some effort, even among Afrikaners, to do away with the policy. By the mid-1970s, black nationalist groups such as the African National Congress (ANC) and other rebel movements sometimes resorted to violence to protest apartheid.

In the Heart of the Country (1977) was the first of Coetzee's novels to be published in both South Africa and the United States. Coetzee's strong international reputation was established with In the Heart of the Country and solidified with his next novel, Waiting for the

Barbarians (1980). Life and Times of Michael K corresponds thematically to Coetzee's earlier works but includes a new dimension in its focus on the oppression of a single character. Michael K is a slow-witted outcast who searches with his mother for a home during a turbulent period of an unnamed country's civil war. Although Coetzee has denied the similarities, critics frequently compare Michael K and the character K in Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*. Like Kafka's K, Michael K is victimized by social forces he can neither control nor understand.

End of Apartheid In his collection of essays, White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa (1988), Coetzee continues to investigate the power of language by analyzing the works of white South African writers. Attempting to expose the relationship between language and cultural identity, Coetzee focuses on how European values and conventions are reflected in South African policies and attitudes concerning property and government. The novel Age of Iron (1990) traces the experiences of Elizabeth Curren, a white South African woman suffering from cancer who writes long letters to her daughter in the United States. While representing Coetzee's abiding concerns with human suffering and the dissolution of oppressive and racist regimes, Age of Iron also reflects recent positive changes in South Africa. Some legal aspects of apartheid were abandoned by the South African government in the mid-1980s, and violent political protest continued until more reforms were put in place in the late 1980s. Apartheid essentially ended in the early 1990s, and South Africa became a democracy in the mid-1990s.

Coetzee's publications in the 1990s and early 2000s often reflected these changes. The essays in Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship (1996) looks at how censorship affects writers under three regimes, including apartheid. Coetzee became more personal in two volumes of autobiography, Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life and its follow-up, Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II (2002). In the first book, he recounts his childhood while commenting on the contradictions of apartheid and subtle distinctions of class and ethnicity. Postapartheid South Africa is fictionally examined in the critically praised Disgrace (1999). Because of Coetzee's constant and sensitive attention to the issues of his time and place led to his receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003. He continues to teach English at the University of Cape Town and to produce new works.

Works in Literary Context

The South African environment in which Coetzee was raised and spent much of his life profoundly shaped his work and moral compass. In both his fiction and nonfiction, he often explores apartheid, its effect on all South Africans, and the fallout after its demise. While addressing the brutalities and contradictions associated with both colonial oppression and apartheid, Coetzee often writes

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Coetzee's famous contemporaries include:

Alan Paton (1903–1988): South African writer and activist most famous for his novel Cry, the Beloved Country.
 Nelson Mandela (1918–): Former president of South Africa and antiapartheid activist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

Stephen Biko (1946–1977): South African antiapartheid activist who died under suspicious circumstances while in police custody.

Barbara Kingsolver (1955–): American novelist whose *Poisonwood Bible* (1998) won the National Book Prize of South Africa.

from an apolitical viewpoint that extends beyond the geographic and social boundaries to achieve universal significance.

Apartheid Often using his native South Africa as a backdrop, Coetzee explores the implications of oppressive societies on the lives of their inhabitants. Coetzee's second novel, In the Heart of the Country, explores racial conflict and mental deterioration. A spinster daughter, Magda, tells the story in diary form, recalling the consequences of her father's seduction of his African workman's wife. In Age of Iron Coetzee addresses the crisis of South Africa in direct rather than allegorical form. It's the story of Mrs. Curren, a retired professor dying of cancer and attempting to deal with the realities of apartheid in Cape Town. As her disease and the chaos of her homeland progress, Mrs. Curren feels the effects her society has had on its black members. The book takes the form of a letter from Mrs. Curren to her daughter, who lives in the United States because she cannot tolerate apartheid.

Muteness and Speech Foe, a retelling of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, marked a transitional stage for Coetzee. Central to this story are the mute Friday, whose tongue was cut out by slavers, and Susan Barton, the castaway who struggles to communicate with him. Daniel Foe, the author who endeavors to tell Barton's story, is also affected by Friday's speechlessness. Both recognize their duty to provide a means by which Friday can relate the story of his escape from the fate of his fellow slaves who drowned, still shackled, when their ship sank, but also question their right to speak for him.

Works in Critical Context

Often using his native South Africa as a backdrop, Coetzee explores the implications of oppressive societies for the lives of their inhabitants. As a South African, however,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Coetzee's Foe retells the classic saga of the shipwrecked Robinson Crusoe by borrowing a character from the older novel. Here are a few other works that "borrow" characters.

The Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), a novel by Jean Rhys. It tells the sad story of the first Mrs. Rochester, from Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre.

Grendel (1971), a novel by John Gardner. It retells the classic tale of *Beowulf*—but from the monster's point of view.

Young Frankenstein (1974), a film directed by Mel Brooks. It spoofs Mary Shelley's Frankenstein by having the title character, also a scientist, embarrassed to be Dr. Frankenstein's grandson.

Coetzee is "too intelligent a novelist to cater for moralistic voyeurs," Peter Lewis declared in the *Times Literary Supplement*. "This does not mean that he avoids the social and political crises edging his country towards catastrophe. But he chooses not to handle such themes in the direct, realistic way that writers of older generations, such as Alan Paton, preferred to employ. Instead, Coetzee has developed a symbolic and even allegorical mode of fiction—not to escape the living nightmare of South Africa but to define the psychopathological underlying the sociological, and in doing so to locate the archetypal in the particular."

Waiting for the Barbarians In Waiting for the Barbarians, Coetzee, "with laconic brilliance, articulates one of the basic problems of our time—how to understand...the mentality behind the brutality and injustice," Anthony Burgess wrote in New York magazine. In the story, a magistrate who attempts to protect the peaceful nomadic people of his district is imprisoned and tortured by the army that arrives at the frontier town to destroy the "barbarians" on behalf of the empire. The horror of what he has seen and experienced affects the magistrate in inalterable ways, bringing changes in his personality that he cannot understand. Doris Grumbach, writing in the Los Angeles Times Book Review, found the novel a book with "universal reference." "The intelligence Coetzee brings us in Waiting for the Barbarians comes straight from Scripture and Dostoevsky."

Responses to Literature

1. Ask a few classmates to read *Robinson Crusoe* along with *Foe*. In your reading group, discuss why Coetzee might have chosen to alter *Robinson Crusoe* in

- the way that he did. Which book is a more entertaining read? Why?
- 2. Ask a classmate who is also reading *Waiting for the Barbarians* to join you in listening to Philip Glass's operatic version of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Discuss whether you think it captures the emotions of the book.
- 3. Read Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. Coetzee has denied that his Michael K is influenced by Kafka's Josef K. Write a short essay explaining whether you think there is a connection.
- 4. Many of Coetzee's novels take the form of diary entries or letters. In a letter to your teacher, explain why you think he chooses this form rather than just tell the story outright.

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☒ Samuel Taylor Coleridge

BORN: 1772, Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire,

England

DIED: 1834, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

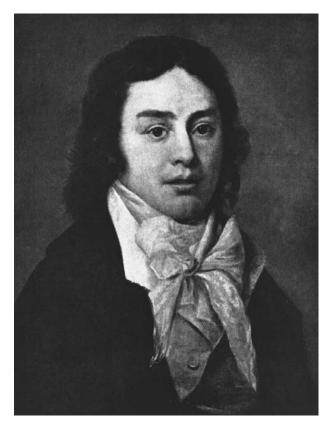
Lyrical Ballads (1798, rev. ed., 1800)

Christabel (1816)

Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions (1817)

Overview

British author Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a poet, philosopher, and literary critic whose writings have been enormously influential in the development of modern



Samuel Taylor Coleridge Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, photograph. The Library of Congress.

thought. In his lifetime, Coleridge was renowned throughout Britain and Europe as one of the Lake Poets, a close-knit group of writers including William Wordsworth and Robert Southey. Today, Coleridge is considered the premier poet-critic of modern English tradition, distinguished for the scope and influence of his thinking about literature as much as for his innovative verse.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Unfocused Youth Coleridge was born on October 21, 1772, in the village of Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire, England, where he lived until the age of ten, when his father died. The boy was then sent to school at Christ's Hospital in London. Later, he described his years there as desperately lonely; only the friendship of future author Charles Lamb, a fellow student, offered solace. From Christ's Hospital, Coleridge went to Jesus College, Cambridge, where he earned a reputation as a promising young writer and brilliant conversationalist. He left in 1794 without completing his degree.

Coleridge then traveled to Oxford University, where he befriended Robert Southey. The two developed a plan for a "pantisocracy," or egalitarian agricultural society, to be founded in Kentucky. By this time, the American colonies had completed their revolution, and the United States was in its infancy. Kentucky became a state in 1792. For a time, both Coleridge and Southey were absorbed by their revolutionary concepts and together composed a number of works, including a drama, *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794), based on their radical politics. Since their plan also required that each member be married, Coleridge, at Southey's urging, wed Sara Fricker, the sister of Southey's fiancée. Unfortunately, the match proved disastrous, and Coleridge's unhappy marriage was a source of grief to him throughout his life. To compound Coleridge's difficulties, Southey lost interest in the scheme, abandoning it in 1795.

Focused on Poetry Writing Career Coleridge's fortunes changed when in 1796 he met the poet William Wordsworth, with whom he had corresponded casually for several years. Their rapport was instantaneous, and the next year, Coleridge moved to Nether Stowey in the Lake District, where he and Wordsworth began their literary collaboration. Influenced by Wordsworth, whom he considered the finest poet since John Milton, Coleridge composed the bulk of his most admired work. Because he had no regular income, he was reluctantly planning to become a Unitarian minister when, in 1798, the prosperous china manufacturers Josiah and Thomas Wedgwood offered him a lifetime pension so that he could devote himself to writing.

Aided by this annuity, Coleridge entered a prolific period that lasted from 1798 to 1800, composing *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, *Frost at Midnight*, and *Kubla Khan*. In 1798, Coleridge also collaborated with Wordsworth on *Lyrical Ballads*, a volume of poetry that they published anonymously. Coleridge's contributions included *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, published in its original, rather archaic form. Most critics found the poem incomprehensible, including Southey, who termed it "a Dutch attempt at German sublimity." The poem's unpopularity impeded the volume's success, and not until the twentieth century was *Lyrical Ballads* recognized as the first literary document of English Romanticism.

Focus on Criticism As Coleridge was working with Wordsworth and publishing key poems, Great Britain was undergoing changes. While the British Empire had lost the thirteen American colonies, British settlement of Australia had increased, and New Zealand's soon began. In 1800, the Act of Union of Great Britain and Ireland formally brought the United Kingdom into being. Following the publication of Lyrical Ballads, Coleridge traveled to what later became Germany, where nationalism was on the rise. He developed an interest in the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich von Schelling, August Wilhelm, and Friedrich von Schlegel. Coleridge later introduced German aesthetic theory in England through his critical writings.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Coleridge's famous contemporaries include:

William Wordsworth (1770–1850): Coauthor with Coleridge of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth was one of the founding fathers of the Romantic movement.

Napoléon Bonaparte (1769–1821): French general and emperor, Napoleon's ambitions brought the French Revolution to a close and directly influenced the course of European and American history for more than a century to come.

Eli Whitney (1765–1825): American inventor remembered for inventing the cotton gin, a device that greatly increased the productivity of cotton farmers.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827): German composer Beethoven was highly influential at the end of the Classical era of music. His compositions were popular with the new generation of Romantic artists.

George Walker (1772–1847): English Gothic novelist who wrote in the antireform style, his works were reactions against the work of writers William Godwin and Thomas Holcroft.

Upon his return in 1799, Coleridge settled in Keswick, near the Lake District. The move to Keswick marked the beginning of an era of chronic illness and personal misery for Coleridge. When his health suffered because of the damp climate, he took opium as a remedy and quickly became addicted. (Opium is a drug derived from poppy juice, which was commonly used for many ailments from fever to sleeplessness and pain management in Western medicine in this period. Many artists and writers of the Romanic period used opium.) His marriage, too, was failing; Coleridge had fallen in love with Wordsworth's sister-in-law, Sara Hutchinson. He was separated from his wife, but since he did not condone divorce, he did not remarry.

End of Close Friendship with Wordsworth In an effort to improve his health and morale, Coleridge traveled to Italy but returned to London more depressed than before. He began a series of lectures on poetry and Shakespeare, which helped establish his reputation as a critic, yet they were not entirely successful at the time because of his disorganized methods of presentation. Coleridge's next undertaking, a periodical titled the Friend, which offered essays on morality, taste, and religion, failed due to financial difficulties. He continued to visit the Wordsworths, yet was morose and antisocial. When a mutual friend confided to him Wordsworth's complaints about his behavior, an irate Coleridge, perhaps fueled in part by his jealousy of Wordsworth's pro-

ductivity and prosperity, repudiated their friendship. Although the two men were finally reconciled in 1812, they never again achieved their former intimacy.

Productive Years Late in Life Coleridge's last years were spent under the care of Dr. James Gilman, who helped him control his opium habit. Despite Coleridge's continuing melancholy, he was able to dictate the Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions (1817) to his friend John Morgan. The Biographia Literaria contains what many critics consider Coleridge's greatest critical writings. In this work, he developed aesthetic theories, which he had intended to be the introduction to a great philosophical opus that was never completed.

Coleridge published many other works during this period, including the unfinished poems *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel*, as well as a number of political and theological writings. This resurgence of productivity, coupled with his victory over his addiction, brought Coleridge renewed confidence. His newfound happiness was marred by failing health, however, and he died in 1834 of complications from his lifelong dependence on opium.

Works in Literary Context

Readers of Coleridge have always been confronted with a daunting problem in the sheer volume and incredible variety of his writings. His career as an intellectual figure spans several decades and encompasses major works in several different fields, including poetry, criticism, philosophy, and theology. Because of the richness and subtlety of his prose style, his startling and often profound insights, and his active, inquiring mind, Coleridge is now generally regarded as the most profound and significant prose writer of the English Romantic period.

Spiritual Symbolism The poem The Rime of the Ancient Mariner perhaps best incorporates both Coleridge's imaginative use of verse and the intertwining of reality and fantasy. The tale of a seaman who kills an albatross, the poem presents a variety of religious and supernatural images to depict a moving spiritual journey of doubt, renewal, and eventual redemption. The symbolism contained in this work has sparked diverse interpretations, and several commentators consider it an allegorical record of Coleridge's own spiritual pilgrimage. Critics also debate the nature of the Mariner's salvation and question whether the poem possesses a moral.

Influence of German Romantic Philosophy Coleridge's analyses channeled the concepts of the German Romantic philosophers into England and helped establish the modern view of William Shakespeare as a master of depicting human character. The *Biographia Literaria*, the most famous of Coleridge's critical writings, was inspired by his disdain for the eighteenth-century empiricists who relied on observation and experimentation to formulate their aesthetic theories. In this work, he turned

to such German philosophers as Kant and Schelling for a more universal interpretation of art. From Schelling, Coleridge drew his "exaltation of art to a metaphysical role," and his contention that art is analogous to nature is borrowed from Kant.

Definition of Imagination Of the different sections in the Biographia Literaria, perhaps the most often studied is Coleridge's definition of the imagination. He describes two kinds of imagination, the primary and the secondary: the primary is the agent of perception, which relays the details of experience, while the secondary interprets these details and creates from them. The concept of a dual imagination forms a seminal part of Coleridge's theory of poetic unity, in which disparate elements are reconciled as a unified whole. According to Coleridge, the purpose of poetry was to provide pleasure "through the medium of beauty."

Shakespeare Criticism Coleridge's other great critical achievement is his work on Shakespeare. His Shakespearean criticism is among the most important in the English language, although it was never published in formal essays; instead, it has been recorded for posterity in the form of marginalia and transcribed reports from lectures. Informed by his admiration for and understanding of Shakespeare, Coleridge's critical theory allowed for more in-depth analysis of the plays than did the writings of his eighteenth-century predecessors. His emphasis on individual psychology and characterization marked the inception of a new critical approach to Shakespeare, which had a profound influence on later studies.

Influence As a major figure in the English Romantic movement, he is best known for three poems, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan, and Christabel. Although the three poems were poorly received during Coleridge's lifetime, they are now praised as classic examples of imaginative verse. The influence of Ancient Mariner rings clear in Shelley and Keats in the next generation, and in Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti, and Swinburne among their Victorian inheritors. In the title of W. H. Auden's Look, Stranger! (1936), the echo of the Mariner's exhortation, "Listen, Stranger!" from the text of 1798, shows how far Coleridge's voice would carry.

Coleridge was also influential as a critic, especially with *Biographia Literaria*. His criticism, which examines the nature of poetic creation and stresses the relationship between emotion and intellect, helped free literary thought from the neoclassical strictures of eighteenth-century scholars.

Works in Critical Context

Critical estimation of Coleridge's works increased dramatically after his death, but relatively little was written on them until the twentieth century. Opinions of his work vary widely, yet few today deny the talent evident

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Coleridge claimed *Kubla Khan* was inspired by an opium-induced dream. Here are some other works that were inspired by dreams, opium experiences, or flights of imagination:

Confessions of an English Opium Eater (1822), a memoir by Thomas de Quincey. Coleridge's friend and fellow opium addict wrote of his experiences with addiction. The Castle of Otranto (1764), a novel by Horace Walpole. The first Gothic novel, this story set the genre's conventions, from crumbling castles to secret passageways to melodramatic revelations. A sensation upon its publication, it single-handedly launched a genre.

Compendium of Chronicles (1307), a literary work by Rashid al-Din. This fourteenth-century Iranian work of literature and history includes the detail that the inspiration for Kubla Khan's palace was given to the Mongolian ruler in a dream. The book was published in English for the first time twenty years after the final revision of Coleridge's masterpiece.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790–1793), a poem by William Blake. This poem explicitly explores the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious minds and the role of imagination as prophecy.

in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan, and Christabel.

The Coleridge phenomenon, as it might be called, has been recounted in every literary generation, usually with the emphasis on wonder rather than disappointment, though sometimes—among moralizing critics, never among poets—with a venom that recalls the disillusionment of his associates. Henry James's story, "The Coxon Fund" (1895), based on table talk of the genius who became a nuisance, is indicative of both attitudes. The Coleridge phenomenon has distorted Coleridge's real achievement, which was unique in scope and aspiration if all too human in its fits and starts.

Kubla Khan For many years, critics considered Kubla Khan merely a novelty of limited meaning, but John Livingston Lowes's 1927 study, The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination, explored its imaginative complexity and the many literary sources that influenced it, including the works of Plato and Milton. Though Coleridge himself dismissed the poem as a "psychological experiment," it is now considered a forerunner of the work of the Symbolists and Surrealists in its presentation of the Unconscious.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner Lyrical Ballads was deliberately experimental, as the authors insisted from the start, and Ancient Mariner pointed the way.

The largely negative reviews that the book excited on publication concentrated on *Ancient Mariner*, in part because it was the most substantial poem in the collection, but also because of its self-consciously archaic diction and incredible plot. The poem was considered strange, and the character of the Mariner also caused confusion.

Despite the problems, the poem flourished on the basis of strong local effects—of its pictures of the "land of ice and snow" and of the ghastly ship in the doldrums, in association with a drumming ballad meter. Wordsworth frankly disliked it after the reviews came in, but Lamb led the way in appreciating its odd mix of romance and realism. Showing its influence, satires were also published in leading periodicals.

Responses to Literature

- 1. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is a poem steeped in symbolism. Choose an aspect or character of the poem (such as the Albatross) and discuss its symbolic meanings.
- 2. Featured in Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, Xanadu has since entered the English language as another word for paradise or utopia. Describe your own personal Xanadu in a poem.
- 3. Like *Kubla Khan*, Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ozyman-dias* describes a fantastical ancient kingdom. Compare the two kingdoms and how they influence the tone of their respective poems.
- 4. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the killing of an albatross represents a crime against nature. What crimes against nature might a modern person commit to bring about similar punishment as suffered by the Mariner?
- 5. How does the historical Kublai Khan compare with Coleridge's dream-inflected vision of the Mongol leader?

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Colette

BORN: 1873, Saint-Sauveuren-Puisaye, France

DIED: 1954, Paris, France
NATIONALITY: French
GENRE: Novels, plays
MAJOR WORKS:
Claudine at School (1900)
Chéri (1920)
Gigi (1945)

Overview

French author Colette was also a mime and dancer who appeared on stage scantily clad. Most significantly, Colette was a great writer whom Marcel Proust called "maître" (master).



Colette Colette, 1948, photograph. John Craven / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Happy Childhood Colette was born on January 28, 1873, in Saint-Sauveur-en-Puisaye in the département of Yonne, as Sidonie Gabrielle Colette, daughter of Jules and Sidonie Colette. Her mother, the daughter of journalists and writers, had been married before and had two children from her first marriage. Sidonie was a remarkable woman who later figured importantly in Colette's autobiographical works and, as Sido, was the model Colette idealized in the later part of her life. Her father was more remote and so preoccupied with his obsessive love for his wife that the child felt he had little time for her.

An Early Marriage Colette had a happy childhood. She grew up in an era commonly referred to as the Belle Époque (Beautiful Era), during which Europe—particularly France and Germany—experienced an extended period of peace and prosperity. This lasted until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The Colettes, however, were plagued by increasing financial difficulties, and when Colette reached the age of seventeen, her future seemed threatened. In France at the end of the nineteenth century the only prospect for a respectable middle-class girl was marriage, but the Colettes could offer no dowry, and it would be difficult to find a husband to accept a woman with no dowry. The solution to this problem was thirtyfive-year-old Henry Gauthier-Villars, son of a well-known publisher and with whom Jules Colette had been acquainted.

Henry Gauthier-Villars, better known as Willy, was a music critic, journalist, and manager of a writing mill. Though notorious for womanizing, he had been living for three years in a stable relationship with a woman named Germaine Servat who had recently died and left him with a small son. Because of his dubious reputation, Willy could not hope to marry a rich socialite, and was happy to marry the young Colette. For her part, Colette was dazzled by the worldly Willy and eager for the adventure a life with him seemed to promise.

Becoming Madame Willy In 1893 Colette became Madame Willy, but her life for the next thirteen years in Paris would be one of frequent disillusionment, for Willy soon reverted to his old ways. For a long time she was seriously ill with an unexplained malady. It was soon after her recovery that Willy suggested she write down some of her stories about her childhood, including some potentially scandalous details—which she obediently did. At first he put the stories aside, but he later decided that he had made a mistake and rushed them to print under his own name. Claudine à l'école (1900, published as Claudine at School in 1930) thus became the first of the Claudine series. Sidonie Gabrielle Willy became Colette the writer.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Colette's famous contemporaries include:

Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923): Parisian Sarah Bernhardt was the most famous actress of her era, renowned for her tragic roles.

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955): African American educator who founded Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida.

Marchese Guglielmo Marconi (1874–1937): Pioneer of the radiotelegraph system who shared a Nobel Prize in Physics with Ferdinand Braun in 1909.

Marcel Proust (1871–1922): Profound and prolific essayist and novelist who spent his life on one of the most revered works of the century: *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–1927).

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901): French painter who depicted the bohemian and other lifestyles of Paris. For this he was known as the "soul of Montmartre."

Featured in the Claudine series was a wild, clever, sensual, outspoken, and both tender and cruel girl who was a version of Colette herself. The girl discovers lesbian affairs between headmistresses and teachers, has visits by a lascivious doctor, and has many racy conversations. The series became so popular it extended to Claudine collars, scent, haircuts (modeled on Colette's), and a play Willy directed based on the second book of the series. In the starring role was the Parisian music-hall actress Polaire, whom Willy called one of his "twins." He was often seen on opening nights with Polaire on one arm and her "twin," Colette, on the other.

Seeking Independence Claudine s'en va: Journal d'Annie (1903, published as The Innocent Wife in 1935), clearly marks the beginning of the end of Claudine. The first-person narrative is transferred to a new heroine, Annie, one of Claudine's friends and an alter ego of both Claudine and Colette. This parallels Colette's plans to leave Willy and find her independence. From 1904 to 1907 Colette prepared to leave Willy. However, because Willy's name was on her works and he was receiving almost all her royalties, Colette could not afford to leave. Instead, she set about training herself for a new career as a dancer and mime.

Female Friends and Lovers After leaving Willy, Colette found comfort among new friends and in liaisons with Natalie Barney and the Marquise de Belbeuf, known as Missy. In the 1932 Ces Plaisirs (published as The Pure and the Impure in 1933), Colette wrote about the way in which women who are hurt by men defend themselves by

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Colette's fiction often treated the subject of unconventional love affairs. Here are some other works that focus on difficult relationships:

Wuthering Heights (1847), a novel by Emily Brontë. In this classic, the two main characters love each other deeply but are torn apart by class differences.

Another Country (1962), a novel by James Baldwin. African American author Baldwin details the lives of young bohemians in New York's Greenwich Village neighborhood during the 1950s.

Rubyfruit Jungle (1980), a novel by Rita Mae Brown. In this much-acclaimed book, tomboy Molly falls in love with another woman.

Forbidden Love: A Harrowing True Story of Love and Revenge in Jordan (2003), a novel by Norma Khouri. In this book, an Arabian Muslim woman falls in love with a Catholic man with dire consequences.

turning toward other women for affection and sympathy. In writing it was risqué enough, but expressed on stage at the Moulin Rouge—mimed as a female-to-female embrace, danced nearly naked—it brought the curtain down. Colette was the new scandal of Paris.

New Themes Liberation became the theme of the next Colette work, which confirmed her talents. La Vagabonde appeared in serial form in La Vie Parisienne (1910), was published in book form the same year, and was later translated as Renée la Vagabonde in 1931 and again as The Vagabond in 1954. It is considered by most critics to contain her best writing. In the work she found her voice, gave nods to the earlier characters of the Claudine series, and gave birth to an anagram-like name and protagonist, Renée Néré—clearly Colette's double.

New Family While her protagonists rejected the love offered by suitors, Colette was succumbing to it. In December 1910, having had the short story "Le Poison" recently published in the daily paper Le Matin, Colette met subdirector Henry de Jouvenel. Jouvenel was of aristocratic descent and, like Willy, ambitious and a womanizer. In September 1911, Colette moved in with him, and in December of the following year married him, when she was two months pregnant and three months into grieving the loss of her mother, who had recently died.

Still, Colette seemed content. She had continued doing mime and was still writing, particularly short stories, and *Entrave* (1913, published as *Recaptured* in 1931), sees a once-free Renée now "hobbled" by needs,

nostalgia, and regret, as well as a male foil who is inferior in talent and brains and who is a "big, dense male." Colette gave birth to Colette-Renée de Jouvenel, whom she nicknamed Bel-Gazou, on July 3, 1913.

The collection of short stories *L'Envers du music-hall* (1913, published as *Music-Hall Sidelights* in 1957) was well received, but Colette's marriage began to come apart soon after Jouvenel was mobilized as a reserve officer in August 1914, at the start of World War I. The couple divorced in 1924.

Wide Acclaim and Lasting Love Affair After World War I, a conflict that devastated Europe, Colette's career blossomed. She published Chéri in 1920, and soon became friends with avant-garde writer Jean Cocteau. In 1925 Colette met Maurice Goudeket, a businessman turned journalist sixteen years her junior, with whom she was to have her longest and happiest liaison. By the end of the 1920s, Colette was considered one of France's greatest living writers, a reputation she cemented with Sido (1929), a book whose heroine was based on her mother.

Colette and Goudeket were married on April 3, 1935. Colette stirred controversy yet again for her actions during the Nazi occupation of France in World War II. The Nazi-controlled French government, called the Vichy government, was reviled by members of the resistance movement. Colette, however, cooperated with the government, perhaps out of concern for the safety of her Jewish husband, whom she hid in her attic during the war. In 1944 she published the popular novel *Gigi*, which was adapted as a successful Broadway play in 1951 and, in 1958, a major Hollywood musical.

Colette was awarded France's Legion of Honor in 1952. She died in 1954 and was given a state funeral.

Works in Literary Context

Colette's Influences Her mother Sidonie—Sido for short—was Colette's greatest influence and strongest supporter; in Colette's book entitled Sido, Colette writes of her childhood and her mother's nurturing and powerful influence.

Theatrical Style The theater had obviously had a potent influence on Colette, for Chéri her best-known work, reflects the shapes and sounds of theater experienced by Colette. The same penchant for rhythm is found in all of her writing, though it is more mature in the later works, just as is her projecting of herself onto her characters. These characters, like Colette, search for love and autonomy, but they come to accept their solitary destinies by embracing fate. They sacrifice happiness of love through love of liberty.

Colette's Influence and Impact Writers like Proust, so affected by works like Chéri, would express their gratitude and admiration. Proust, in fact, admitted to being "moved to tears," both out of awe and envy that

particular scenes had made his own attempts at similar scenes look pathetic. Proust declared his admiration for Colette's insight and sureness of touch. In general, as an exemplar of her time, Colette engaged in the "hothouse atmosphere of the fin de siècle," the changing of both moral standards and women's roles. Colette was a part of the influence on such change, in person and through her writing, until her death. For example, her state funeral was the first given a divorced woman by the French Republic. Six thousand people walked by her bier in the Palais-Royal to pay their respects. Most of them were women. Whether they realized it or not, Colette had in some way influenced the way they dressed, thought, felt, and lived.

Works in Critical Context

The Vagabond While several of her works have earned accolades, many others also stand out as most often read, studied, and discussed—among them The Vagabond. The Vagabond was perhaps the first work to evidence overall harmony of construction, and it was the first to receive wide acclaim as a major literary achievement—a classic example of the roman d'analyse (novel of analysis), both restrained in tone and tightly knit in structure. It also has a lively and convincing setting, and is a moving and profound study of a very individual woman, one who has characteristics which remain significant today. Hers is a continuing feminine dilemma, but it is as well that of any human being who, in isolation, faces up to the realization that he or she is responsible for his or her own destiny. The final part of the novel in particular exudes a poignant existential sadness that moved readers and critics alike. The critic and journalist André Billy declared at the time that Colette merited the terms of praise that had once been applied to François-Auguste-René Chateaubriand: "She has invented a new way of being sad," he wrote.

Responses to Literature

- 1. What do you think Colette means when she uses the word "freedom" in her work? Where does she describe or tell a story of freedom? How does this match your understanding of the word?
- 2. Colette's 1944 novel *Gigi* was made into an Academy Award–winning musical in 1958. Read the novel and then watch the film. Do you notice any major differences between the two? Why do you think the film version was so popular?
- 3. The "Belle Époque" is a period in European history lasting from the end of the nineteenth century until the beginning of World War I marked by a flowering in the arts and sciences. Use your library and the Internet to find out more about art, science, culture, and politics during this period. Select one major scientific advancement or artistic work and

- describe and explain it in the context of Belle Époque Europe.
- 4. Like Colette, author Zelda Fitzgerald published some of her work under her famous husband's name. Use your library and the Internet to find out more about Zelda Fitzgerald's work. What were the consequences of her decision to let her work be credited to F. Scott Fitzgerald? How do those consequences differ from what Colette experienced?

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Wilkie Collins

BORN: 1824, London, England DIED: 1889, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction

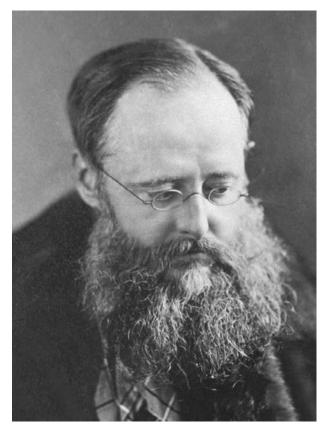
MAJOR WORKS:

The Woman in White (1860)

The Moonstone (1868)

Overview

Wilkie Collins combined the romantic and the realistic in his mystery stories and provided a model for subsequent suspense and mystery fiction. He experimented with existing genres by introducing the principle of fair play, the formula of the least likely suspect being the criminal, multiple narrative styles, and the depiction of the crime as flowing naturally from the personality of the criminal. He also developed the character of the eccentric detective, accompanied by a faithful chronicler, who succeeds through rational methods where the police have failed.



Wilkie Collins Collins, William Wilkie, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Italian Travels Lead to Critical Attitude Toward Victorian England William Wilkie Collins was born on January 8, 1824, in London, England, to William Collins, a successful painter, and Harriet Geddes Collins. His father emphasized the importance of religious faith and aristocratic connections, but the biting attacks in Collins's novels upon religious hypocrisy and social pretentiousness reveal a break from his father's principles. From 1836 to 1838, he and his family traveled through Italy. This glimpse of Italian culture was a vivid alternative to the narrowness of British Victorian society and perhaps provided a basis for the critical attitude toward that society he was later to display.

Collins lived most of his life in a time known as the Victorian era, during which Queen Victoria ruled England and its territories. Queen Victoria sat on the throne longer than any other British monarch, from 1837 until 1901. This period saw significant changes for both Britain and Europe as a whole, with advances in industrialization leading much of the population to jobs in urban factories instead of on farms as in the past. The era was also marked by a preoccupation with proper behavior in

society and domestic life, a topic that figures prominently in the works of Collins and other Victorian writers.

In 1841, after he had finished school, Collins was apprenticed to a firm of tea merchants. Two years later, his first short story was published. At his father's prompting, he began to study law in 1846, which later would influence the narrative structures of his two best-known novels.

Collins and Dickens Early in 1851, Collins and Charles Dickens became close friends, and Collins became a paid contributor to Dickens's Household Words magazine in 1853 and an editor in 1856. Dickens considered Collins the most promising young writer of his time, and his encouragement and the association with Household Words were influential in shaping Collins's approach to fiction and his career as a popular author.

Early Novels Basil is Collins's most significant novel of the 1850s. It concerns a man who becomes infatuated with a woman below his social station. The novel was condemned by many contemporary critics because it did not "elevate and purify" the reader. With The Dead Secret (1857), Collins moved closer to sensation fiction, a genre critic Kathleen Tillotson has aptly christened the "novelwith-a-secret." Two volumes of short fiction, After Dark (1856) and The Queen of Hearts (1859), display Collins's increasing preoccupation with suspense and an innovative approach to detection.

Unconventional Personal Life In 1859 Collins began living with Caroline Graves, a widow with a daughter. This was a highly unconventional choice and was met with the disapproval of the majority of his friends. In 1868, Graves married Joseph Clow, a plumber, and Collins began a relationship with Martha Rudd, with whom he would have three children. By the early 1870s, Graves was again living with Collins. He never married either woman but kept two separate households. At his death he left the income from his estate divided between the two women and his three children, who were acknowledged in his will. Collins's sympathetic fictional treatment of illegitimacy and the problems of fallen women, as well as his frequently cutting comments about those who confused morality with respectability, no doubt reflect his personal situation and his sensitivity to the difficulties faced by the two women in his life.

The Woman in White The Woman in White (1860) was Collins's most popular book and one of the most popular novels of the century, although it was not reviewed positively by critics. Collins's use of a witness as narrator not only enriches the novel but also emphasizes the legal predicament of the female protagonist and the desperate position of married women who were, as Victorian philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill said, "legal slaves." As well as being superb suspense fiction, it embodies serious comment on contemporary

society. Deception is the key to its mystery, as it is in his next two novels, *No Name* (1862) and *Armadale* (1866).

The Moonstone In 1868 the second of Collins's great novels, *The Moonstone*, appeared. No novel considered a detective story has received such praise or held its public over such a long period of time. Again using multiple narrators, Collins limited the focus of this novel to one event, the disappearance of the fabulous Indian diamond of the title.

Later Work and Death After Charles Dickens died, Collins's work declined in quality, although it was still popular. Integrating suspense and social criticism proved a difficult and often impossible feat. A continued decline in his health, constant pain relieved only by laudanum—a derivative of opium—and the effects of long-term addiction resulted in increasing reclusiveness in the late 1870s and 1880s.

Despite the inferior quality of Collins's later works, he continued to be popular with the public and was widely reviewed in influential periodicals and newspapers. His last years, marred by deteriorating eyesight and the constant pain of gout, were not happy, but he continued working until his death on September 23, 1889, from a stroke.

Works in Literary Context

Domesticated Crime The significance of Collins's work lies in its fusion of the romantic and the realistic and its creation of suspense and terror in ordinary, middle-class settings. Collins's influence on mystery and detective fiction, from writers Sir Arthur Conan Doyle through Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers to the present, reveals the crucial importance of his domestication of criminal activities and the great debt that subsequent authors owe to his emphasis upon the actual.

E. F. Bleiler writes: "While Collins was aware of the work of Poe and Gaboriau, he paid little heed to their contributions and worked in the mainstream of Victorian domestic and social fiction." By integrating accurate depictions of contemporary manners and customs with the secrecy and romance of crime, he established a pattern that modern writers of mystery fiction still follow.

Works in Critical Context

The obituaries that followed Collins's death emphasized his skill as a storyteller and expressed gratitude for the delight he had given audiences for forty years. Algernon Charles Swinburne called him a "genuine artist" of the second rank, comparable in merit to novelists Anthony Trollope and Charles Reade. Although his reputation, like that of many other Victorian writers, was in eclipse during the early twentieth century, it began to revive in the 1920s when T. S. Eliot turned critical attention to his work. Today Collins's reputation is secure with both academic critics and the mystery story—reading public.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Collins's famous contemporaries include:

Charles Dickens (1812–1870): Considered the leading Victorian novelist, Dickens integrated social criticism into his popular books; his best-known works include *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930): Scottish writer who created the Sherlock Holmes detective stories.

Stonewall Jackson (1824–1863): American Confederate general during the Civil War; one of the Confederate army's best generals, his death by pneumonia was a severe blow to their cause.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863): British novelist famous for *Vanity Fair*, a satirical look at English society.

Jules Verne (1828–1905): French writer who helped pioneer the genre of science fiction; novels such as *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* explored underwater and space travel before either was technologically possible.

According to E. F. Bleiler, "Wilkie Collins is generally considered the greatest Victorian master of mystery fiction." Critic and poet T. S. Eliot and mystery writer Dorothy Sayers have called *The Moonstone* the best-ever English detective story.

Subjectivity and Individual Perception The Victorian distinction between the novel of incident and the novel of character worked to Collins's disadvantage, and although he himself professed contempt for such criticism, it is significant that in the preface to The Moonstone he wrote that he was attempting "to trace the influence of character on circumstances" rather than "the influence of circumstances upon character" as he had previously done. Modern criticism, following Henry James, sees plot and character as inseparably interrelated and is perhaps better able to understand Collins's achievement than either Collins or his contemporaries. This is especially true of the narrative technique used in both The Woman in White and The Moonstone. Contemporaries recognized that multiple narrators contributed to the dramatic development of the story and to its "lifelike" quality without, apparently, seeing that Collins, in making subjectivity and individual perception central to his method, had made not only a major advance in the possibilities of narrative but had also devised a method for the revelation of personality that is inextricable from plot.

The Woman in White When it was published in 1860, The Woman in White brought sharply divided

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Collins examined social issues within the mystery story, expanding its range as a tool for social criticism. Here are some other works that do the same:

- Blanche Cleans Up (1999), a novel by Barbara Neely. In this novel, an African American housekeeper working for a wealthy white family gets involved in a murder case affecting her employers; along the way to solving the crime, she comments on race and class issues in contemporary America.
- The Dead Sit Round in a Ring (2004), a novel by David Lawrence. In this novel, a London detective must find the link between a group suicide and eastern European human trafficking.
- The Ghostway (1992), a novel by Tony Hillerman. In this story, a Navajo detective must solve a shooting and must also decide between moving off the reservation because of his love for a white woman or becoming more deeply involved in his Navajo culture.
- Hard Time (1999), a novel by Sara Paretsky. A Chicagobased private investigator ends up in jail in this novel, revealing what life is really like on the inside of a women's prison.
- "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1861), a short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. A "diary" of a woman slowly going mad, this short story examines both the medical profession and women's subservient role in Victorian society.

reviews. An unnamed reviewer for Dublin University Magazine, for example, states that the author's work is "nothing that would entitle him to a higher place among English novelists, than the compiler of an average school-history would enjoy among English historians." The reviewer also states, "There is not one lifelike character: not one natural dialogue in the whole book. Both hero and heroine are wooden, commonplace, uninteresting in any way apart from the story itself." The author's attempts at modern realism are compared to "the pages of a nursery tale." In contrast, a reviewer for Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine calls it a "remarkable novel," and "the elaborate result of years of labor." The reviewer concludes, "[Collins] has improved upon all his early works to an extent which proves in only too edifying and complete a way the benefits of perseverance and painstaking."

Responses to Literature

 Do you think that current detective shows on TV examine social issues as they examine crime, like Wilkie Collins did in his work? Does the current

- focus on the scientific side of crime solving take away from the psychological side, or does it add to it?
- 2. Collins's personal life was scandalous for his time, with his long-term relationships with two women, neither of whom he married. Yet his fiction was still extremely popular, and the public probably did not know many personal details about his relationships. How does knowing the messy details of an artist's personal life affect how you view their work? Do you think it should be public knowledge, or should domestic issues remain private?
- 3. Collins used multiple narrators with shifting points of view. Do you find it effective when movies or TV shows present various points of view, making the truth more difficult to figure out, or do you find it confusing?
- 4. Mystery and detective fiction are hugely popular genres. Why do you think that is? What makes reading about crime so popular? How is our reaction to crime different today than it was in the Victorian period?
- 5. Collins examined crime as following naturally from someone's personality. There have been many theories of how criminals are created, from genetics to social conditions. Using your library's resources and the Internet, research some theories of criminality and write an essay comparing and contrasting them. Which makes the most sense to you? Why?

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Padraic Colum

BORN: 1881, County Longford, Ireland

DIED: 1972, Enfield, Conn.

NATIONALITY: *Irish*GENRE: *Poetry, drama*

MAJOR WORKS: The Land (1905)

Wild Earth: A Book of Verse (1907)

Thomas Muskerry (1910)

Dramatic Legends, and Other Poems (1922)

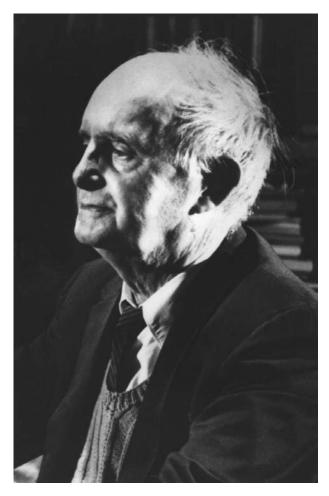
The Poet's Circuits: Collected Poems of Ireland (1960)

Overview

Padraic Colum was a major figure in Ireland's Literary Revival period in the early twentieth century. It was Colum—writing out of his childhood experience of life in the midlands of Ireland—who most accurately expressed the sensibility of the Irish peasant that larger figures like W. B. Yeats and John M. Synge saw as the bedrock of a new literature for Ireland.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Unstable Early Years The oldest of the eight children of Patrick and Susan MacCormack Collumb, Colum (as he spelled his name later) was born on December 8,



Padraic Colum, Padraic, photograph. AP Images.

1881, in a County Longford workhouse, where his father was master. At the time, Ireland was still under British rule. Poverty and hunger remained widespread among the Irish in the decades after the devastating effects of the potato famine of the 1840s, while their British landlords and rulers controlled the land and continued to export crops to England. In 1889, his father, in an effort to improve the family fortunes, left the family for the United States, to participate in the Colorado gold rush. After the great famine, many Irish immigrated to America to seek a better life and economic prosperity. Colorado was a destination for people desiring to find a fortune in gold, silver, and lead, and mining towns were common throughout the state in the late nineteenth century.

When Patrick Collumb went to America, the children went to live with a grandmother and her family in a rural area of neighboring County Cavan. Here, Colum experienced the life of the Irish countryside that later figured in his best work. He came under the influence of an uncle, Micky Burns, who traveled through the country with Colum in tow, buying fowl to sell for export. Burns passed the time by using his inexhaustible

store of local ballads and legends to entertain the young Colum.

Life in Dublin Sparks Literary Career When Colum's father returned in 1890, he took a job as a railway stationmaster, and the family moved to Sandy Cove, just south of Dublin. Padraic attended the Glasthule National School in Sandy Cove until he was seventeen and worked with his brother delivering parcels for the railway. In 1898, he took a job as a clerk in the Irish Railway Clearing House in Dublin. Colum also began writing in his spare time and frequenting the various literary circles in Dublin.

It was an exhilarating time to be in Dublin, especially for a young man interested in literature, for several reasons. The effort to establish an Irish theater was underway. New literary and political periodicals were springing up as many Irish continued to seek home rule, if not outright independence from Great Britain. An interest in Gaelic literature (Gaelic is the native language of Ireland) and folk traditions was being kindled through various groups. Writers such as Yeats, George Russell, and George Moore were gathering to discuss the possibilities for a new kind of Irish literature.

Early Poems and Plays Emphasize Rural Life Colum saw several of his poems published in the new United Irishman, run by his friend Arthur Griffith, later the leader of Sinn Fein. Some of these poems—including "A Drover" and another of Colum's best-known lyrics, "A Poor Scholar of the Forties"—attracted the attention of Yeats, who came to be an important friend and mentor to Colum.

Although it was Colum's poetry that first attracted Yeats's eye, it was Colum's interest in the theater that eventually placed him in the center of the literary revival. Through his membership in *Cumann na nGaedeal*, a nationalist group that undertook to produce patriotic plays, Colum met, in 1901, Willie and Frank Fay, the amateur actors who later played a significant part in the success of the Abbey Theatre. Colum became an active member of the Fays' dramatic group, writing several plays and even acting in a few productions. In the next few years, Colum wrote several successful plays that, like his poetry, reflect his vision of rural and provincial Irish life.

By his description, Colum was determined to write poetry that was anchored "close to the ground." Nowhere is this effort more evident—or more successful—than in his first volume of poems, Wild Earth: A Book of Verse, published in 1907 and revised and augmented in 1916 as Wild Earth, and Other Poems. This work demonstrates as well how his early poetry stands at the opposite end of the poetic spectrum; opposite the deliberately mythic and symbolic poetry that Yeats was writing early in his career.

Radical Changes in Personal Life Between the first publication of Wild Earth in 1907 and the publica-

tion of the expanded version in 1916, Colum's life changed radically. In 1912, he married Mary Catherine Gunning Maguire, a young university graduate who later had a distinguished career as a literary critic. In the same time period, there were startling changes in the political life of Ireland as well, and Colum was very much caught up in these. He joined the Irish Volunteers, a militant nationalist group led partly by members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and took part in a bloody gunrunning episode at Howth, near Dublin, in July 1914. The Brotherhood was a secret nationalist society that wanted Ireland to become an independent republic and used violence to help achieve its goal. Shortly after the gunrunning incident, Colum and Mary accepted a longstanding invitation to visit Colum's aunt in Pittsburgh. What was planned as a visit of a few months turned out to be lifelong residence in the United States. Consequently, Colum was not present during the Easter Rising of 1916. During the Easter Rising, the Volunteers' poorly coordinated attempt to seize and control a government building in Dublin went awry and led to five days of bloody fighting in the streets between Irish insurgents and the British forces sent to quell the rebellion.

In Pittsburgh, Colum was offered the chance to give some lectures on Irish literature, and later he received other offers for similar appearances in New York. It soon became clear—partly because World War I was drying up most of Colum's potential sources of income from writing for British periodicals—that economic survival for the Colums depended on their staying in the United States; so they stayed. Meanwhile, World War I raged through Europe, leaving 10 million soldiers dead, including many Irish soldiers who fought alongside British forces. The war had begun in 1914 and had ground to a bloody stalemate on the Western front by 1916. The United States abandoned its isolationist stance in 1917, entering the war and tipping the scales in favor of the Allied forces of France, England, and Russia. The war ended in 1919.

A Growing Reputation Colum's next collection of poetry, Dramatic Legends, and Other Poems, appeared in 1922. The book contains some new poems in the vein of the peasant poetry of Wild Earth and a considerable number of love lyrics, including several that demonstrate Colum's connection with the Gaelic tradition of love poetry dealing with loss.

During his early years in the United States, Colum's American reputation flourished, especially as a writer of prose. Partly to meet economic needs, Colum wrote Irish folk stories for children, and the result, *The King of Ireland's Son*, published in 1916, marked the first of many such collections in Colum's career. In 1923, his first novel appeared, *Castle Conquer*. Like his early plays, it deals with rural Ireland, specifically with the land war of the 1880s fought on behalf of poor tenant farmers by the Irish Land League. The group sought fair rents as well as ownership of the land for those who worked it. In 1923,

Colum and his wife traveled to Hawaii at the invitation of the Hawaiian legislature, to collect a volume of authentic Polynesian folk poems, stories, and legends. The Hawaiian venture produced two books, published in 1924 and 1925. In 1926, Colum produced a group of essays about Ireland and another collection of similar pieces, *Cross-Roads in Ireland*, that appeared four years later.

Assisting Joyce In the 1920s and 1930s, the Colums lived first in New Canaan, Connecticut, and then settled in New York City. During several visits to Paris in these years, Colum renewed and deepened his earlier friendship with James Joyce, also an Irish-born author. In those early years, Colum had helped raise money for Joyce to try to get Joyce's Dubliners (1914) published in Ireland. He continued to help Joyce however he could, including offering his knowledge of Irish history and topography, which proved of great assistance to Joyce in the latter's work on Finnegans Wake (1939). Colum and his wife later collaborated on a book on Joyce, Our Friend James Joyce (1958).

The last thirty years of Colum's life offer little evidence to counter the argument that the best of his poetry was written early in his career, but Colum remained productive. He and Mary both began teaching at Columbia University in 1939, and Colum continued to lecture widely in the United States and to write children's stories and folktales. His second novel, *The Flying Swans*, appeared in 1957.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Colum wrote five plays based on the tradition of Japanese Noh drama that Yeats had drawn on earlier. Two more volumes of poetry came out in 1953 and 1954, The Collected Poems of Padraic Colum and The Vegetable Kingdom, respectively. It was not until 1960 that the most important volume of poetry in this final period of Colum's career was published. The Poet's Circuits: Collected Poems of Ireland collects poems from his earlier books but presents them as part of a larger vision of the Irish poet. A contract for children's literature with Macmillan Publishers set Colum up financially for the remainder of his life. He divided his later years between the United States and Ireland and died in Enfield, Connecticut, in 1972 at age ninety.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Colum's most successful plays—including The Land (1905), The Fiddler's House (1905), and Thomas Muskerry (1910)—are marked by a directness of style and a realistic vision that identify him as a writer of peasant dramas. These plays also locate him at the opposite end from John W. Synge, Lady Gregory, and Yeats on the spectrum of peasant drama.

Irish Themes Colum's early poetry also shares his commitment to realism and to the life of rural Ireland. Much of the atmosphere in Colum's poetry stems from his acquaintance with the Gaelic tradition and his admiration for several nineteenth-century Irish poets, espe-

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Colum's famous contemporaries include:

Josephine Baker (1906–1975): African-American entertainer and singer who found fame on the Parisian stage in the 1920s. She was later a Civil Rights activist in the United States.

Béla Bartók (1881–1945): The preeminent Hungarian pianist and composer, recognized as one of the most significant musicians of the twentieth century and remembered for his cofounding of the field of ethnomusicology.

William Faulkner (1897–1962): American author considered one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. Faulkner was known for his experimental style and his complex explorations of the culture of the Deep South.

Eamon de Valera (1882–1975): A leader of the Irish Easter Rising, and later President of Ireland.

cially James Clarence Mangan and Samuel Ferguson, who worked to incorporate into English verse the intricate sound patterns and rhythms of Gaelic poetry, something very different from the metered norm of the English tradition. This tendency can be seen in poems such as "A Drover."

Irish traditions flow through most of Colum's work. In *Dramatic Legends*, a second theme of loss is given Irish dimensions, especially in a group of poems titled *Reminiscence*, that documents the passing away of old traditions and ways of life in rural Ireland. *The Poet's Circuits: Collected Poems of Ireland*, a long, mostly blank verse poem that introduces the volume, details the growth of a poet's mind, in this instance of an Irish poet's mind, and insists on the relationship between the Irish poet and the land and its traditions.

Works in Critical Context

The poetry that Colum produced during the 1920s and 1930s is, on the whole, considered unimpressive. But later and earlier work has been honored by scholars and critics alike. His early poems were often called works of genius by his contemporaries. One example of an important lauded early work was the collection *Wild Earth*.

Wild Earth (1907) A number of the poems in Wild Earth are translations of Gaelic poems or restorations of traditional Irish songs, and some of the best of these are love lyrics. An early critic of Wild Earth, Mary C. Sturgeon, linked the work of Colum with that of another Irish poet deeply committed to the native peasant tradition, Joseph Campbell. Sturgeon argued that in the poetry of Colum

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who, like Colum, also wrote in the style of realism on themes involving their homelands:

A Book of Saints and Wonders (1901), a collection of folktales by Lady Gregory. In this volume, the author shapes stories based on those told to her at Ireland's Gort workhouse.

Death of a Naturalist (1966), a poetry collection by Seamus Heaney. In this volume the poet depicts childhood, reflects on identity, and describes the setting of rural Ireland.

Dubliners (1914), a short-story collection by James Joyce. In this volume, the author explores members of the middle class in early twentieth-century Ireland.

The Playboy of the Western World (1907), a play by John M. Synge. In this three-act drama set in an illicit bar in Ireland, Christy Mahon is on the run—claiming to have murdered his father.

and Campbell one can distinguish "the almost subconscious influence of race. Whether from inheritance or environment, it has 'bred true' in these poets; and it will be found to pervade their work like an atmosphere."

Responses to Literature

- If anything influenced Colum very early on, it might have been his father's leaving to participate in the Colorado gold rush—to make money for the family. Investigate the circumstances of the Colorado gold rush (also known as Pike's Peak gold rush). How many people, and what types of people, participated in it? Regardless of whether Colum's father was successful or not, how would this event have affected the young boy?
- 2. In his writing, Colum has a commitment to Irish folk tradition. Research Irish folk mythology or history to get a deeper sense of the people of Colum's writings and find paintings of traditional folk culture (such as Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* [1885]). As you look over the works of art, choose one you believe would best go with a Colum poem and share your reasons for your choice.
- 3. Besides being committed to Irish folk tradition, Colum maintained a faith in humanity in general. This is evident in many of his portrait poems. Choose a person to write about, someone who inspires your faith. Write a portrait poem. Include physical characteristics of the person, special features, bits of dialogue, or actions of the person to show your readers the greatness of this person.

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☑ Ivy Compton-Burnett

BORN: 1884, Piner, Middlesex, England

DIED: 1969, London, England

NATIONALITY: British

GENRE: Fiction
MAIOR WORKS:

A House and Its Head (1935)

Elders and Betters (1944)

Manservant and Maidservant (1947)

The Present and the Past (1953)

Mother and Son (1955)

Overview

British novelist Ivy Compton-Burnett was a prolific writer, regarded during her lifetime as one of the most original writers of fiction in England. She attracted a small but devoted following of readers who appreciated



Dame Ivy Compton-Burnett Compton-Burnett, Dame Ivy, 1955, photograph. Picture Post / Hulton Archive / Getty Images.

her epigrammatic prose style and delighted in plot structures that were more often than not outrageously complex. The link between biography and fiction is crucial to an understanding of Compton-Burnett and her work.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Childhood in a Large Victorian Family Born on June 5, 1884, in Piner, Middlesex, England, Compton-Burnett was the eldest daughter of James Compton Burnett and his second wife, Katherine. She was reared in a Victorian household of twelve children that included the numerous domestics whom she later cast as characters in her novels. Her father was a successful homeopathic physician. His second wife was a beautiful woman fifteen years his junior. To mark her own status, and that of her children, she introduced the hyphen into the Compton-Burnett name, thus distinguishing herself from her husband and his children by a previous marriage.

A Victorian Family Life James Compton-Burnett's medical practice in London kept him away from the family home in Hove during the week, leaving his wife in charge of the household. In the Victorian era—the nineteenth-century decades when Queen Victoria ruled over Great Britain—women were idealized as the helpmates of men and the keepers of the home and were seen as the "weaker sex." A woman's proper sphere of influence was considered

her home and her children. Compton-Burnett's mother created an atmosphere of family tension and encouraged the sibling rivalries and secret alliances that were later to be analyzed with such clinical precision in her daughter's fiction. From the materials of her upbringing, Compton-Burnett would re-create this world of her childhood, inverting and subverting its values.

Except for the years spent at Howard and Royal Holloway Colleges, Compton-Burnett spent her life within the confines of this family until she was thirty years old. The children from her father's first marriage left home as early as possible. After their father's sudden death in 1901, the children of the second marriage were left in the care of their mother, but her mental and physical health degenerated so severely in the period leading up to her death in 1911 that Compton-Burnett was called upon to take increasing responsibilities in the rearing of her younger siblings. These responsibilities suited neither her interests nor her natural abilities. She was more interested in writing, and found some success at it, published her first novel *Dolores* in 1911.

Multiple Tragedies Compton-Burnett's attempt to establish a writing career were halted by events at home. Between the death of her father and the eventual breakup of the family home in Hove in 1915, the entire family lived "under the shadow of death." They passed these years in mourning, first for their father and later for their brother Guy, who died of pneumonia in 1905. Her other adored brother, Noel, was killed while serving in World War I at the Battle of the Somme (a five-month British and French assault on the German position in Somme, which led to six hundred thousand casualties on the Allied side alone) in 1916. Two younger sisters, Topsy and Baby, killed themselves in a suicide pact in 1917. During these difficult years Compton-Burnett became increasingly withdrawn, and her jovial spirit gave way to bitterness. She retreated behind a mask of reserve, carefully watching the behavior of those around her.

Fourteen-Year Hiatus Between the publication of Dolores and Pastors and Masters (1925), there was a fourteen-year silence during which she recuperated from the trauma she suffered because of the deaths of her parents and four siblings. During this time, she also tried—unsuccessfully by her own account—to recover from the effects of the World War I. The Great War was fought primarily in continental Europe but greatly affected Britain. While it began with the assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Serbia, the war soon encompassed much of the continent as diplomatic alliances and long-simmering tensions came to a head. Britain lost nearly an entire generation of young men who fought in the conflict, with casualties topping two million.

During these years, Compton-Burnett did not write. After her sisters left the house in Hove, she lived with various women—including the widow of her brother Noel—eventually meeting Margaret Jourdain, a strong,

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Compton-Burnett's famous contemporaries include:

Wallis Simpson (1895–1986): An American socialite who married King Edward of England. Edward had to abdicate in order to marry the twice-divorced woman, and they lived as the Duke and Duchess of Windsor thereafter.

Jane Edna Hunter (1882–1971): The African-American attorney and social worker renowned for founding the Phyllis Wheatley Association of Cleveland, Ohio.

Alice Paul (1885–1977): An American suffragette remembered as the one who was most instrumental in ensuring the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave women the right to vote

A. A. Milne (1882–1956): British author best known for his beloved chidren's books about Winnie the Pooh.

independent professional writer whose expertise was English antiques and period furniture. The two women began to live together when Jourdain was forty-three and Compton-Burnett thirty-five. Jourdain was in large part responsible for Compton-Burnett's return to health and her renewed interest in writing.

About this time, Compton-Burnett discovered the writings of British-born author Samuel Butler, who wrote such novels as *The Way of All Flesh* (1903). Here she found the great theme and succinct style for her novels that were to follow. After *Pastors and Masters*, she published *Brothers and Sisters* (1929). Like its 1925 predecessor and most of the novels to follow, *Brothers and Sisters* restricts its subject to family life and draws heavily on events from the author's own personal life. There are recognizable portraits of her, her brothers and parents, and her mother's father.

Limited Book Sales Between the publication of Men and Wives (1931) and More Women than Men (1933), Compton-Burnett and Jourdain moved to a spacious first-floor flat in South Kensington—the residence they would occupy until their respective deaths. Though Compton-Burnett realized she was becoming well known as a novelist and well reviewed as a writer, she began to worry about the sales of her books. She grew concerned about her earning power as a novelist, becoming dissatisfied with more than one publisher because her novels, though they sold steadily, continued to sell in only a small market.

Gap in Writing during World War II Between Parents and Children (1941) and Elders and Betters (1944), there is a gap in Compton-Burnett's writing brought about by England's involvement in World War

II. In Europe, the war was primarily fought to thwart the territorial ambitions of Nazi Germany and its dictator, Adolf Hitler, who sought to control the whole of the continent. Germany had nearly achieved its goal by 1941 and then subjected Great Britain to intense bombing in preparation for what was believed to be an invasion to take over the island nation. To escape the intense bombing of London in 1941, Compton-Burnett and Jourdain went to Hartley Court, near Reading, for the duration of the war. *Elders and Betters*, her only novel of the war period, is one of her darkest works—in which every character but one (Jenney) is marred by selfishness and greed, and every action tends to deceit and cruelty.

After World War II ended in the mid-1940s with a victory for Great Britain and its allies, Compton-Burnett's country faced rebuilding challenges with vigor and the author was able to write again. *Manservant and Maidservant* (1947) represented the zenith of her career as a writer of comic fiction. In contrast, however, *Darkness and Day* (1951) was published ten days after Margaret Jourdain's death from a lung ailment, marking the moment when Compton-Burnett's life again returned to the shadow of loneliness, recalling the years of despair that followed the breakup of her own family.

New Recognition By the 1950s, the brilliant middle period of Compton-Burnett's creativity had passed. It was in these later years of her life, though, that she was discovered and appreciated by other writers and literary officials. The 1960s marked a decade of national and international recognition of her work. She was named a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1967. Compton-Burnett spent the last years of her life with only the closest of friends. She suffered from a weak heart and two broken hips, the effects of several bad falls that made entertaining and traveling nearly impossible. She died of bronchitis on August 29, 1969, leaving unfinished the manuscript of her last novel, whose title suggests her keen awareness of its place in the canon of her writings: The Last and the First.

Works in Literary Context

Influences Novelist Samuel Butler's philosophy and prose style heavily influenced Compton-Burnett's works. Among the various passages she underlined from Butler's *Note-Books* several point to her attitude toward the tyrannical and claustrophobic aspects of family life that constitute her artistic subject matter. She also discovered in Butler's work a succinct and skeletal prose style that she imitated, refining it to an elegance previously unknown in the English novel.

Unique Style Difficult to classify, either in terms of genre or historical period, Compton-Burnett's works are both modern and outdated, both typical and atypical of the English novel tradition in which she wrote. Her novels expose various characters' efforts to attain and maintain power in the family. They also often dissect

the artificiality of the society they examine in an equally artificial speech. In addition, her works reveal the secret passions of family members through acts of theft, murder, blackmail, incest, and violence.

Men and Wives demonstrates her introduction of the more heinous crimes central to her fiction—matricide, fratricide, and infanticide—showing that while such crimes may never result in retribution (no Compton-Burnett criminal is ever brought to court, as such secrets are kept within the family), neither do they succeed in significantly altering the balance of power. The author introduces here the first of a long series of charming baronets (Sir Godfrey Haslam) and the first of her articulate, comic, and irrepressible butlers (Buttermere). Buttermere begins the long line of servants whose pungent observations on events and ability to "manage" their managers, constitute a classic level of Compton-Burnett comedy.

Complicated Themes In many of Compton-Burnett's novels, there seems to be no easily extractable moral from the story. Indeed, the inversion of moral values is perhaps the central theme of her work. Rather than providing solutions to moral dilemmas, she merely sets in motion events that lead to such dilemmas, allowing the reader to juggle and balance ethical distinctions. Instead of ignoring or displacing legal and religious strictures that would ordinarily be placed upon the actions of characters like those she creates, she pushes the moral questions of her novels beyond the limits imposed on human action by church and state. Her novels complicate the ethical issues they treat, making it impossible to find easy solutions to the problems posed by her characters' efforts to establish power and dominion over other human beings.

Works in Critical Context

Compton-Burnett shared nothing with other novelists of her time, and she remained as highly individualistic and anachronistic as her fictional subjects. This rendered her works nearly impossible to classify. Scholar Pamela Hansford Johnson has suggested that it is this very impossibility of classifying her work that has ensured a continuing interest in it. Johnson wrote, "Miss Compton-Burnett's great strength lies in the fact that we cannot place her; and so also does her weakness." Of such works as *Pastors and Masters*, for example, critics agreed with Johnson.

While Compton-Burnett's readership was limited in the early years, perhaps more than any other critic, Robert Liddell was responsible for bringing Compton-Burnett's work to a larger reading public. In 1953, he addressed the problems of her novels and excused her style and choice of themes (of family tyranny). He wrote, "She is...able to depict a world unshaken by modern warfare, a community rooted in a single place, and lives still ruled, and even laid waste, by family tyranny. She can do this, because she need only take a period of fifty years ago, when she was herself already alive—therefore she can recreate this age without the artificiality and falsity of the historical novelist."

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Here are a few works by writers who have also scrutinized family values:

Agnes Grey (1847), a novel by Anne Brontë. In this Victorian novel, the author explores her own family as well as those families for which she served as governess.

Long Day's Journey into Night (1956), a play by Eugene O'Neill. In this modern drama, excruciatingly close focus is put on the dysfunctional Tyrone family.

Song of Solomon (1977), a novel by Toni Morrison. This contemporary tale focuses on the dynamics of the Southern African American family.

Wuthering Heights (1847), by Emily Brontë. In this Gothic romance, the family itself plays a predominant role in the tale

Pastors and Masters When Compton-Burnett increased the complexity and enhanced the action, she also increased the passion with which critics reviewed that work. Pastors and Masters is the most complicated of the early novels, exploiting the tensions of family life through a fast-paced plot that relies almost solely on dialogue. Critical response reflected the strains that Compton-Burnett placed on her readers. The New Statesman review of the book acclaimed it a "work of genius," while the reviewer admitted that there was "nothing of which to take hold" in the work, that there was virtually no "story" in the novel.

Responses to Literature

- 1. Compton-Burnett scholars believe that the writers' work and life are inextricably bound. Consider the comments and excerpted dialogue by Compton-Burnett that follow. How do you interpret each comment? If you didn't know her general life story, what do you think the comments say about the woman herself?
 - "Time has too much credit.... It is not a great healer. It is an indifferent and perfunctory one. Sometimes it does not heal at all. And sometimes when it seems to, no healing has been necessary."
 - "You are clutching at a straw. And when people do that, it does sometimes save them."
 - "You cannot eat your cake and have it." "That is a mean saying. You could, if you had enough cake. It is sad that it has become established. It throws a dark light on human nature."

- "Pride may go before a fall. But it may also continue after."
- "I think it nearly always rains. We only notice when it pours."
- "People are only human. But it really does not seem much for them to be."
- "To know all is to forgive all, and that would spoil everything."
- 2. Compton-Burnett wrote about the late-Victorian family. Research the nature of the typical family in the late 1800s and early 1900s in England, and compare the Victorian family to a typical family in your culture. What do the two still have in common? What to you seems drastically different? To what do you attribute these differences?

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Maryse Condé

BORN: 1937, Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe

NATIONALITY: West Indian

GENRE: Fiction, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Heremakhonon (1976)

Seau (1984)

I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem (1986)

Crossing the Mangrove (1990)



Maryse Condé Conde, Maryse, photograph. © Jerry Bauer. Reproduced by permission.

Overview

West Indian author Maryse Boucolon, who writes under the name Maryse Condé, is a prolific novelist, playwright, and critic, whose books explore the clash of cultures and races, particularly in Caribbean settings. A Frenchlanguage author not widely known outside of France and her native Guadeloupe, Condé writes novels that are rich in historical detail and political discussion.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Private Life and Education Born February 11, 1937, in Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe, Condé is the youngest of eight children born to Auguste and Jeanne (Quidal) Boucolon. Guadeloupe is an archipelago, a group of islands, located in the Caribbean Sea and governed by France. It is part of the European Union. In 1953, Condé's parents sent her to study abroad for several years, at Lycée Fénelon and Sorbonne in Paris. While abroad Condé focused her studies on English literature. Five years later, in 1958, she married an African actor, Mamadou Condé.

Restless Years and Move to London The early 1960s were difficult for Condé. To avoid arrest, she was

forced to move from country to country, never safe enough to settle in one place. While difficult, Condé saw the advantages of frequently changing perspectives and seized these opportunities to enrich her writing. Professionally, Condeé worked as an instructor at École Normale Supérieure in Conakry Guinea; at the Ghana Institute of Language in Accra; and the Lycé Charles de Gaulle in Saint Louis, Senegal. Eventually, she fled to London and earned her doctorate degree in comparative literature in 1976 after completing research on black stereotypes in West Indian literature.

First Novel, Divorce, and Remarriage Condé's first novel, Heremakhonon (1976), relates the journey of Veronica, an Antillean student searching for her roots in a newly liberated West African country. During her stay Veronica becomes involved with both a powerful government official and a young school director opposed to the new regime. In 1981 Condé divorced Mamadou and shortly after, in 1982, married Richard Philcox, her translator.

Constructing Characters of Resilience Subsequent Condé novels have varied in scope and setting from more sweeping historicals such as Children of Segu (1984) and The Last of the African Kings (1997), to character-driven narratives such as Crossing the Mangrove (1990) and I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem (1986). In the New York Times Book Review, Howard Frank Mosher observed that one thread uniting all of Condé's work is the creation of "characters [who] not only survive the worst that life can throw at them but also often prevail, on their own terms, against overwhelming odds." Tituba is one such character. Much information about the historical Tituba-a female slave who was accused of witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts-remains a mystery but Condé weaves a fully fleshed tale about the remarkable woman and her triumph over a wealth of adversity. Between 1692 and 1693 more than 150 people were arrested on suspicion of practicing witchcraft in several counties across Massacusettes. Of those accused, nineteen were hung, at least one man was crushed to death under heavy stones, and others died in prison. Tituba was the only one, of three women initially accused, to confess her alleged guilt, although scholars speculate that she was coerced to confess with physical abuse.

Retelling a Classic In Windward Heights (1998), Condé retells the classic Wuthering Heights (1847) story by Emily Brontë. Set at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Cuba and Guadeloupe, the novel explores the corrosive, obsessive love between darkskinned Rayze, a foundling, and the mulatto Cathy Gagneur, who shuns Rayze for a lighter-skinned Creole husband. As with the novel upon which it is based, Windward Heights plays itself out over a series of generations, as Rayze's fury shapes his children and their choices into adulthood.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Condé's famous contemporaries include:

Warren Beatty (1937–): Academy Award- and Golden Globe-winning American actor, screenwriter, producer, and director.

Kamau Brathwaite (1930–): Barbadian poet and a major figure of the Caribbean literary scene.

Derek Wolcott (1930–): West Indian poet responsible for *Omeros*, a retelling of the *Odyssey*, set in the Caribbean.

Philip Glass (1937–): Three-time Academy Awardnominated American composer. Glass is widely considered one of the most influential composers of the late twentieth century.

Bob Marley (1945–1981): Revered Jamaican musician whose legacy lives on via his musical children and his famous dreadlocked image.

Desirada Desirada (1998) looks at the problems facing West Indians but from the perspective of those engaged directly with ideas of European rather than African culture. Marie-Noelle, born on Guadeloupe to a fifteen-year-old mother in mysterious circumstances, begins a voyage of self-discovery that takes her first to France and then to the United States. Yet Marie-Noelle is never able to resolve the central question surrounding her birth. Condé explained in a World Literature Today interview with Robert McCormick, "Marie-Noelle, who only wants to know the answer to some simple questions-Who is my father? Who am I? What happened?—won't ever find out. Because everyone lies. Not in a conscious and malicious way. Because, ultimately, to tell a story is to embellish it, to fabricate it according to one's tastes and desires, to create fiction."

The literary culture of the Caribbean from which Condé writes is rooted both in the oral traditions of the West African griot and in the scripted literature of Europe. Critics of *Desirada* and Condé's other works have honored the author's use of French as a medium for relating the West Indian experience.

Although she has retired from her career as professor emeritus at Columbia University, Condé continues to publish her writings, travel, and speak publicly about her work.

Works in Literary Context

Emphasizing the effects of transition upon ordinary individuals, Condé places her protagonists in situations where they must choose between the existing West African social order and cultural changes prompted by Western influence. The thematic content of her work reflects both

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Though she is West Indian, much of Condé's work takes place in Africa, where she has spent a great deal of time. Perhaps she is drawn to the continent for its diverse natural landscape or its complicated political landscape. In either case, she is not alone; here are some other works that are set in Africa:

Out of Africa (1937), a memoir by Isak Dinesen. The Dutch narrator describes her often idyllic—though sometimes heartbreaking—life on a coffee plantation in Kenya. Cry, the Beloved Country (1948), a novel by Alan Paton. A preacher searches for his son amid the streets of Johannesburg, South Africa, on the eve of apartheid's implementation

Things Fall Apart (1958), a novel by Chinua Achebe. Set in Nigeria, this work deals with the family of an athlete and leader as they struggle under the yoke of British rule. The Poisonwood Bible (1999), a novel by Barbara Kingsolver. Set in the Belgian Congo in 1959, this work tells the story of Nathan Price, a Baptist missionary from Bethlehem, Georgia, who takes his family to Africa to spread the Word in a remote jungle village.

her education in the Western world and the diverse cultural experiences of her travels. Condé is praised for her authentic rendering of such diverse locales as the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe as well as for the lyrical qualities of her prose.

Difficult Politics Condé's first novel Heremakhonon, like many of her later works, is concerned with people placed in or near the seat of political power and affected by the applications of that power. The narrator, Veronica, is the eyes of the reader, but she turns those eyes inward as well as outward. As a free narrator, she can and does jump from time period to time period, but the drama of the whole book is encompassed in a battle between her lover, Ibrahim Sory, and her institute associate and revolutionary, Saliou-a battle waged in and against the name of the titular ruler, Mwalimwana. Veronica does not recognize the fact of the battle early on and she never fully understands it. For the most part, Saliou and Sory impinge upon her nonpolitically—as do other characters caught in the struggle. The political issues force themselves upon her, and upon us, the readers, and it is for political reasons that her stay in Heremakhonon is terminated. The reader may feel that he knows more than Veronica does about the power struggle, yet he always remains dependent upon her for confirmation or refutation of his judgments.

Obviously, Condé sees politics as very much a part of life. However, she does not confuse drama and fiction

with analysis and history. Whatever her literary objective, she strives for integrity, so much so that in anticipation of adverse criticism she has remarked, "I do not believe writing is meant to please people." In the *New York Times Book Review*, Anderson Tepper declared that Condé "has created an impressive body of work...that gives voice to the dispersed and historically silenced peoples of Africa and the Caribbean."

Works in Critical Context

Segu Some critics fault Condé for an excess of detail in Segu. Washington Post contributor Harold Courlander, for example, commented that "the plethora of happenings in the book does not always make for easy reading." The critic explained that "the reader is sometimes uncertain whether history and culture are being used to illuminate the fiction or the novel exists to tell us about the culture and its history." While Howard Kaplan concurred with this assessment, he added in the Los Angeles Times Book Review that Segu "glitters with nuggets of cultural fascination.... For those willing to make their way through this dense saga, genuine rewards will be reaped."

Most agree that Condé expands her scope in Segu. In tracing three generations of a West African family during the early and mid-1800s, notes New York Times Book Review contributor Charles R. Larson, "Condé has chosen for her subject...[a] chaotic stage, when the animism (which she calls fetishism) native to the region began to yield to Islam...The result is the most significant historical novel about black Africa published in many a year." Beginning with Dousika, a Bambara nobleman caught up in court intrigue, Segu trails the exploits of his family, from one son's conversion to Islam to another's enslavement to a third's successful career in commerce, connected with stories of their wives and concubines and servants. In addition, Condé's "knowledge of African history is prodigious, and she is equally versed in the continent's folklore," remarks Larson. "The unseen world haunts her characters and vibrates with the spirits of the dead."

Crossing the Mangrove Condé returns to her native Guadeloupe in Crossing the Mangrove. The title of this novel raises the image of an impossible act, crossing the thick jungle/swamp found along many Caribbean coasts. Behind the image is the story of Francis Sancher, a writer with a mysterious past who comes to live in a small village in Guadeloupe. As a Publishers Weekly reviewer explains, "Sancher, a handsome mulatto on an island besieged by concerns over skin color, turns everyone's hatreds and passions inside out." Through Sancher and the characters that he touches, Condé "vividly evokes the complexities of a color caste system...in a struggle for power and status," Paul E. Hutchinson remarks in Library Journal. Even after Sancher dies mysteriously, he dominates the lives of the villagers. At his wake, Condé follows the

villagers as they discuss the departed. "Condé...intends to portray island life through Guadeloupeans talking among themselves," writes J. P. Slavin in the *Washington Post Book World*. "She magnificently succeeds in bringing realism to a novel which also portrays the rich spiritualism of the West Indies."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Compare and contrast *Windward Heights* (1998), Condé's retelling of *Wuthering Heights* (1847), with Jean Rhys's retelling of *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wide Sar-gasso Sea* (1966).
- 2. Condé has said she is not a political writer. Find evidence to the contrary and explain why you think she is.
- 3. Do you trust Veronica as a narrator in *Heremakhonon*? Why or why not?
- 4. Do you think, as some critics have complained, that *Segu* is too dense? If you were Condé's editor, what would you suggest she cut out?
- 5. Compare Condé's character Tituba with Arthur Miller's version in his play *The Crucible* (1953).

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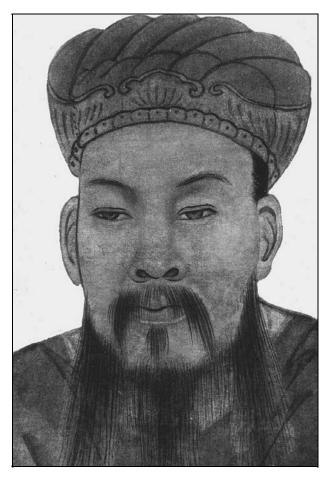
Confucius

BORN: c. 551 BCE, Tsou, Shantung, China DIED: 479 BCE, Ch'-Fu, Shantung, China

NATIONALITY: Chinese
GENRE: Nonfiction
MAJOR WORKS:
The Analects

Overview

A philosopher of unmatched influence in Eastern civilizations, Confucius was a teacher and minor government official whose philosophy has been immortalized in *The Analects*, a collection of sayings attributed to him and his disciples. *The Analects* offers insight into a wide variety of subjects, including government, personal conduct,



Confucius Popperfoto / Getty Images

warfare, family, and the spirit, and has been subject to diverse, and even completely opposite, interpretations over the centuries. In spite of attempts to modify or corrupt its doctrines, Confucianism has endured as the foundation of philosophy and religion in China and is an integral element of the national identities of Korea and Japan as well.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Self-Taught Scholar The job of Confucius's biographers has been considerably difficult due to the muddled accumulation of stories about the great sage. It is generally believed that Confucius was born in the state of Luduring the Chou dynasty. His given name was Kong-Qui, but his disciples called him "Kong the Master," which was Latinized into "Confucius" by Jesuit missionaries. Confucius was three when his father died, and twenty-three when his mother died. By the age of fifteen, Confucius had decided to become a scholar, and he began to educate himself in music and ancient history. Confucius's first occupation appears to have been as supervisor of the

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Confucius's famous contemporaries include:

Pythagoras (c. 572–c. 490 BCE): The famous theorem of this Greek mathematician is still the cornerstone of modern geometry.

Shakyamuni (563–483 BCE): A spiritual leader in India, Shakyamuni is better known simply as "the Buddha."

Cyrus The Great (c. 576–c. 429 BCE): Cyrus the Great founded the ancient Persian Empire and expanded its borders to include large portions of Asia.

Zoroaster (c. sixth or seventh century BCE) Zoroastrianism, the religion born from the teachings of Zoroaster, a Persian, had a major impact on the early teachings of Christianity.

Xenophanes (570–480 BCE): This Greek poet and philosopher is perhaps best known for suggesting that human beings fashion their gods after their own images.

granary in Lu. Some accounts say that Confucius married when he was nineteen but divorced his wife four years later so that he would have more time for his intellectual pursuits. He had one son.

Political Ambition Unhappy with the disunity of the Chou regime, Confucius sought to restore the political harmony described in ancient texts, but he never achieved the elevated post within the Lu administration necessary to effect the changes he envisioned, which included tax reductions and peaceful interaction with neighboring states. Although his own political ambitions were thwarted—he may have served for a time in an insignificant position of a regional bureau—he was able to disseminate his views by teaching students, some of whom would become future leaders, about the principles he felt were necessary to influence the political scene of his time.

Teaching Career Confucius never claimed to have divine revelations. He was not born, he declared, with knowledge, but was fond of antiquity, and earnest in seeking knowledge there. Somewhere around the age of thirty, Confucius began his teaching career. Using an informal, discursive teaching style, Confucius became extremely popular with his students. Although one can only guess what the students studied, undoubtedly they received instruction in ritual, music, history, and poetry. In 518 BCE Confucius is reported to have met the famous teacher Lao Tzu, who supposedly criticized Confucius for his stuffiness and arrogance.

Confucius thought that basic teaching should be uncomplicated. In fact, much of his philosophy is the result of logical deduction, reasoning, and inference. In its historical setting, *The Analects* reveals essentially simple ideas: a vision of a cooperative world; the conviction that antagonism and suspicion, strife and suffering, were largely unnecessary; a profound faith that people's true interests did not conflict but complemented each other.

Travels In the eyes of Confucius, China was drifting on a sea of storms "to hideous ruin and combustion." His solution was to gather and preserve the records of antiquity, illustrating and augmenting them with his own teachings. With such intent, Confucius lectured his disciples on the histories, poems, and constitutional works of the nation.

Around 498 BCE, Confucius, accompanied by several of his disciples, left Lu and embarked on a journey through eastern China. As they wandered throughout the states of Wei, Sung, and Ch'en, their lives were threatened more than once. For instance, Confucius was almost assassinated in Sung. On another occasion, he was mistaken for the adventurer Yang Hu and was arrested and held until his true identity was learned. For the most part, Confucius was received with great respect by the rulers of the states he visited, perhaps even receiving occasional payments from them.

Later Years In 484 BCE Confucius was invited back to Lu. While he was warmly received there, it does not appear that he was given a position of political power. Confucius's favorite disciple, Yen Hui, died the very year of his return to Lu, and in 480 BCE another disciple, Tzulu, was killed in battle. Also during this period in his life, Confucius's only child died. Confucius felt all of these losses deeply, and his sadness and frustration must have been intensified by the realization that his political ideas had found no support among the rulers of his own state. Confucius died in 479 BCE.

Works in Literary Context

In all likelihood, Confucius's philosophies were documented by his disciples and distributed after his death. Confucius, like Buddha, Socrates, and Jesus Christ, made a reputation for himself as an instructor while he was alive, and, like these thinkers, he felt it unnecessary to preserve his own words. Despite his lack of literary production, however, Confucius's influence on future generations of thinkers was tremendous. Because of this, a look at his work in literary context necessitates a description of the evolution of the importance of Confucianism through the years.

Confucianism Through the Years Considered by some as philosophy and others as religion, Confucianism has undergone a complex evolution since the death of its namesake. The first important thinker to expand upon Confucius's work was Meng-tzu, better known by his Latinized name, Mencius. Active during the fourth century BCE, Mencius, like Confucius, was a teacher and

counselor. In the collection of his teachings, Mencius furthered the concept of *Jen*, roughly meaning "good," arguing that the potential for exemplifying such an honorable trait exists in every human being. In direct contrast, the teachings of Hsun-tzu, a prominent Confucian thinker of the third century BCE, stressed the evil nature of humanity. For Hsun-tzu, *Li* functions to suppress selfish instincts.

Subsequent philosophers of the ancient world incorporated mystical schemes, numerology, and aspects of Taoism into traditional Confucian thought. Although the resulting philosophy was in many ways a diluted and contradictory imitation of Confucianism, it was during this period that Confucianism gained widespread prominence. It became the official state religion of China in the second century BCE and eventually spread to other Asian nations.

Wang Ch'ung, a logician of the first century CE, is credited with eliminating the mystical and supernatural elements of Confucianism. It was also during the first century that, after several competing versions circulated, the standard text of *The Analects* emerged. Although scholars question its reliability as the direct transcription of Confucius's sayings, the work is nonetheless acknowledged as the best possible summation of his thought. *The Analects* is composed of twenty books, each made up of aphorisms, questions, and notes attributed to Confucius and twenty of his disciples, most notably Master Tseng, who is credited with twelve sayings of his own; Jan Ch'iu, who became a lieutenant in the powerful Chi Family; and Tzu-kung, who became a prominent diplomat.

Most of the first millennium CE is regarded as a period of relative dwindling of Confucianism's influence in China, a time during which Taoism and Buddhism flourished. Neo-Confucianism arose in the eleventh century largely owing to the scholarship of Chu Hsi, whose historical writings focused on what are now known as "Classical Confucian" texts, thirteen works of ancient origin that address a wide range of topics pertaining to Confucianism. Chu Hsi also explored the metaphysical side of Confucianism, engineering a path to spiritual enlightenment that has been viewed as a response to the challenge posed by Buddhism. During the seventeenth century, a second wave of Neo-Confucianism arose; comparable to the earlier efforts of Wang Ch'ung, its aim was to reestablish the original intent of *The Analects*.

Twentieth-Century Influence The influx of Western civilization into twentieth-century China considerably altered the nation's political, cultural, and philosophical traditions. When Sun Yat-Sen founded the Chinese Republic in 1912, he advocated a form of statesmanship balanced between Confucian values and pragmatic methodology learned from the West. Mao Tse-Tung's organization of the People's Republic of China in 1949, however, neglected Confucius in favor of Marxist ideology, effectively removing the Confucian tradition from

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

History records the lives of many instructors who had a profound impact upon their students, and Confucius was no exception, as he and his students shared a deeply personal and affectionate connection. Often, knowledge of beloved instructors is gleaned from the writings of their pupils themselves. Here are a few works written by students to honor their teachers:

New Testament (c. first century ce), testimony by the disciples of Jesus Christ. Although the authors of the New Testament cannot be definitely determined, it is clear that the text is a collection of writings elucidating the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The Republic (c. 360 BCE), a philosophical treatise by Plato. In this text, Plato outlines much of the political theory of his teacher. Socrates.

Cloud Atlas (2004), a novel by David Mitchell. In this work, an aspiring composer studying under his aging hero realizes that his master has lost his genius.

political discourse, although its principles survive in literature and philosophy.

Works in Critical Context

In some ways, it is difficult to separate critical response to Confucius from the literary tradition in which it is classified because the literary tradition—including the political and social impact of Confucianism—forms a kind of critical response to the text. A great deal of modern scholarship has focused on the clarification of three main principles: *Jen*, *Tao*, and *Li*. The meaning of each term has engendered a multitude of interpretations, resulting in diverse readings of Confucius. Further scholarship has attempted to discern how much of *The Analects* is from Confucius and how much belongs to his disciples. Today, Confucius's work—no matter how one interprets its principles or speculates its origins—is considered a valuable and complex philosophical collection of ideas rivaling those of Socrates and Buddha.

The Three Principles Alternately translated as "good," "love," and "reciprocity," Jen is more particularly, according to Arthur Waley, "a sublime moral attitude, transcendental perfection attained to by legendary heroes..., but not by any living or historical person." This opinion contradicts the belief often espoused by earlier scholars that all humans are endowed with Jen.

Tao, translated as "the way," had been used before Confucius to describe both positive and negative ways of doing things. Confucius's innovation, according to H. G. Creel, was to recast the word as "the way...that individuals, states, and the world should conduct themselves

and be conducted." Taoism, the philosophical school based upon the *Tao te Ching* of Lao Tzu—who may have been a contemporary of Confucius—provides a similar interpretation of the term, albeit in a more mystical and personal context.

Scholar Benjamin I. Schwartz defines *Li* as "all those 'objective' prescriptions of behavior, whether involving rite, ceremony, manners, or general deportment, that bind human beings and the spirits together in networks of interacting roles within the family, within human society, and with the numinous realm beyond." Historically, the discipline required strict adherence to *Li* and inspired some political leaders to impose dictatorial rule on their subjects in the name of Confucius, despite the contention of scholars that a state designed to serve the people is one of Confucianism's central tenets.

The Analects: Whose Are They, Anyway? As in the case of the Gautama Buddha and Socrates, it is not easy to separate the founder's vision from the interpretations of his disciples. The group of statements attributed to Confucius in literature of the centuries following his death is large but often suspect, and The Analects remains the focus of fierce controversy. Compiled long after Confucius's death, the work contains not only the Master's aphorisms, but also those from his disciples. Of the twenty "books" now in existence, linguistic analysis indicates that some may belong to a much later period. Waley and others find many passages which they call non-Confucian and even anti-Confucian. In his view, examinations of how language relates to reality must be later additions, since the "language crisis" in ancient China belongs to a much later development of thought. Tsuda Sokichi, a radical and iconoclastic critic of The Analects, finds the work so permeated with contradictions and anachronisms that he believes it is unusable as a source for the thought of Confucius.

Confucianism in the Western World Ironically, as Western scholars in the twentieth century began to recognize the depth and sophistication of Confucianism—indicated by numerous English translations of *The Analects*—Confucianism in China was on the decline. Many scholars have observed similarities between the teachings of Confucius and those of Socrates and Jesus. D. Howard Smith celebrated the profundity of Confucius as a thinker: "He was convinced that there was a divine order which worked for love and righteousness, and taught that in obedience to that divine order man will find his highest goal."

Responses to Literature

1. Read *The Analects*. Based on your reading, what do you think the *Jen*, *Tao*, and *Li* are all about? What does Confucius have to say about each? Support your response with some passages from the text.

- 2. Confucius was essentially a political thinker. After having read *The Analects*, how do you think Confucius would seek to change the world in which you live? For example, would Confucius advocate "going green"? Write at least ten of your own aphorisms for society today.
- 3. Confucius, Buddha, and Zoroaster, according to the traditional dates of these figures, all lived at the same time and all founded philosophical movements that have been transformed into religions. Why do you think that the sixth century BCE was such a fertile time for the founding of religions? Research the peoples and cultures of that time to help you formulate your response.
- 4. The thoughts of Confucius himself remain unclear because he never actually wrote them down. Instead, what we know of Confucius's teaching is gathered from what his students told about him and his life. Imagine someone has decided to collect your thoughts in a book similar to *The Analects*. What would this book say? What are your basic principles of living and thinking?

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William Congreve

BORN: 1670, Yorkshire, England DIED: 1729, London, England

NATIONALITY: British GENRE: Drama, fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Incognita; or, Love and Duty Reconcil'd (1692)

The Old Batchelour (1693)

Love for Love (1695)

The Mourning Bride (1697)

The Way of the World (1700)

II. A reader of dramatic theory, Congreve was most likely more familiar with the theater than most young men of his era by the time he moved to London around 1689.

The English Restoration and the Golden Age of Satire Congreve was born at a time when England had only recently recovered from a violent civil war, during which the ruling English monarchy was removed from power. In its place, a commonwealth led by Puritan military commander Oliver Cromwell was created. Under Cromwell's strict rule, theaters throughout England were closed down due to their alleged debasement of moral values. When the monarchy was finally restored to power in 1660 under the rule of Charles II—hence the term "Restoration"—theaters were once again opened, and the exuberant feelings of the day made their way into the comedies that became popular during that time. Accordingly, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century are often referred to as The Golden Age of Satire.

London Drama In 1691 Congreve entered the Middle Temple, London, to study law; however, the literary community in London proved to be more appealing to him. With the novel Incognita; or, Love and Duty Reconcil'd, he established himself as a gifted writer of pointed, intelligent wit and soon became John Dryden's friend, legal adviser, and literary prote'ge'. While his legal expertise enabled him to negotiate agreements between Dryden and his publisher, Congreve's educational background helped him make a number of important contributions as a translator to Dryden's editions of classical authors. In addition to Congreve's gift for translation, Dryden recognized the younger writer's ear for the nuances of his own language and predicted that Congreve would be a great literary success.

Congreve's first real success came in 1693 with the drama The Old Batchelour. Like most of the plays produced during this period, The Old Batchelour was written with specific actors in mind. Most biographers believe that Congreve created the role of Araminta, the virtuous and witty inge'nue, for actress Anne Bracegirdle, the object of his lifelong—and unrequited—affection.

Attempt at Tragedy Despite glowing endorsements from such notable writers as Dryden and Swift, 1693's The Double-Dealer was met with much less enthusiasm than its predecessor. However, the overwhelming success of Congreve's next drama, Love for Love, revived his popularity and earned him a full share in a new acting company under William III's protection. Traveling with dramatist Thomas Southerne the next year, Congreve visited Ireland, where he received a master of arts degree from Trinity College and was briefly reunited with his parents. The author of several successful tragedies, Southerne may have encouraged Congreve to try his hand at what most critics of the time considered a higher dramatic form. Ignoring jeers from friends and fellow writers who were certain his attempt would fail, Congreve wrote

Overview

Examining the social conventions of love and marriage with wit and subtlety, William Congreve is hailed as the master of Restoration comedy. His brilliant depictions of human behavior are concentrated in the skillful banter of characters in such plays as Love for Love, The Mourning Bride and The Way of the World. Still performed today, Congreve's dramas have come to represent the standard against which all other comedies of the period are measured.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

A Beginning Rich in Opportunities Congreve was born into an old family of wealth in Bardsey, West Yorkshire, England. After his father received a lieutenant's commission, the family moved to Ireland, where Congreve was educated, along with friend and future satirist Jonathan Swift, at Kilkenny School and Trinity College, Dublin, his curriculum focusing on theology as well as Greek and Latin classics. Congreve often visited Dublin theaters and was exposed to the most celebrated dramas of the time, including Ben Jonson's Volpone and Thomas Durfey's The Boarding House, before these kinds of performances were banned during the reign of James

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Congreve's famous contemporaries include:

William Wycherly (1641–1715): Wycherly wrote plays of sharp social criticism, particularly of marriage and sexual morality.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759): Famous for his operas and oratorios, this German-born composer lived in England most of his adult life.

Joseph Addison (1672–1719): Writer of the opera libretto *Rosamond*, Addison also founded the *Spectator* with Richard Steele in 1711 with the intent of presenting morally instructive stories of gallantry, foreign and domestic news, and poetry with satirical undertones.

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745): After writing several poems, Swift turned to prose satire directed against philosophers, intellectuals, politicians, and aristocrats, culminating in his most famous work, *Gulliver's Travels*.

Joseph I (1678–1711): Son of Leopold I, Joseph I served as king of Hungary (1687), King of the Romans (1690), and Holy Roman Emperor (1705–1711).

Alexander Pope (1688–1744): Pope was well-known for his satirical poetry and his mastery of the heroic couplet, notably in *The Rape of the Lock*.

The Mourning Bride (1697), a tragedy that received praise for both its morality and literary merit.

Public Feud Having received, for the most part, accolades for his work, Congreve was unprepared for clergyman Jeremy Collier's attack in A Short View of the Immortality and Profaneness of the English Stage (1698). Collier condemned Congreve's work as shamelessly immoral, prompting Congreve to refute those claims in Amendments to Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations (1698), which asserts that all well-crafted art is innately moral. While Congreve's rebuttal was witty and cogent, his emotionally charged approach against Collier's self-righteousness and social standing provoked further arguments. Tired of these exchanges, Congreve concentrated on writing his last comedy, The Way of the World, a drama that enjoyed moderate success.

Literary Output Hindered by Illness Afflicted with gout and advancing blindness early in the eighteenth century, Congreve composed a libretto, or the text for an opera—in this case, The Judgment of Paris. It was well-received despite opera's unpopularity during that time. He joined with dramatist John Vanbrugh to establish a new theater, the Haymarket, a project financed by members of the Kit-Kat Club, a literary-political society that included members of Whig nobility and renowned authors Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Although

the Haymarket soon closed, Congreve's association with influential members of the Kit-Kat Club gained him two government posts and a lifelong appointment as secretary of Jamaica, both positions of financial security. By 1706, however, bad health limited Congreve's literary output. Living a quiet life in London entertaining family and friends but publishing little, Congreve died in 1729 after a carriage accident.

Works in Literary Context

Inspired as a writer by such extraordinary thinkers as Plato, Aesop, Miguel de Cervantes, and William Shakespeare, Congreve's career as an author of Restoration comedy was influenced by the satirical plays of Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, and Ben Jonson. In addition, the French playwright Moliére provided Restoration dramatists a model for comic relief through dialogue, along with ideas for many themes and plots. Perhaps what had the most impact on Congreve's writing life was Restoration society itself—that rigid, artificial, refined world of eighteenth-century England. For the most part, Congreve's work was well-received by his contemporaries, the condemnation from Jeremy Collier's notwithstanding.

Comedy of Manners A comedy of manners is a witty form of dramatic comedy that satirizes the manners and pretentiousness of society. In calling attention to ridiculous schemes and frivolous conversation, this literary form attacks the superficiality and materialism by which people judge others. By presenting the question of whether characters meet certain social standards—standards that are often morally inconsequential—the comedy of manners reveals the conflict between self-interested motives and refined behaviors. Aware of the shallowness of decorum, the protagonist manipulates situations to his own advantage. Because aristocratic audiences were not interested in didactic lessons being aimed directly at them, the purpose of the comedy of manners was to entertain.

As do most all comedy of manners dramas, *The Way of the World* consists of comic material revolving around intimate relationships and farcical situations. For instance, marriage occurs for the sake of convenience, characters brazenly carry on affairs, jealousy is commonplace, gallantry is feigned, and women are falsely demure. In this play, Congreve's message is clear: The way of the world may be humorous, but it is not kind. Like all romantic comedies, *The Way of the World* has a happy ending; however, the avenue to a joyful resolution is one of cruelty, degradation, and treachery.

Congreve's mastery of Restoration comedy influenced his contemporary playwrights and made a significant impact on the genre. In addition, Congreve's words resonated with audience members such that several phrases from Congreve's play *The Mourning Bride* (1697) have made their way into common parlance including "music has charms to soothe a savage breast"

and "heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor hell a fury like a woman scorned." Congreve's influence continues to be felt today and his plays are still performed.

Works in Critical Context

From the time of Jeremy Collier's attack to the twentieth century, Congreve's critical reception has been influenced by moral perception. Despite his controversial ideas of sexual morality, as well as his shortcomings as a playwright, Congreve has maintained a reputation of being the master of the English comedy of manners. Although some critics judge Congreve's work to be impenetrable and his dialogue nothing more than babble, others, including Bonamy Dobrée, disagree. Dobrée states, "If you cannot translate the idiom of a past time—the idiom of behavior as well as of language—into that of your own, it may seem dull; if you can do so it appears highly relevant. Trivial? Only if you cannot see through the universality that underlies every phase of the social mask." Recent academic criticism transcends the brilliant dramatic language in favor of deconstructing the distinctive manner by which Congreve transforms the material of his plays into a body of coherent actions.

The Way of the World Despite its lukewarm reception by his contemporaries, The Way of the World has long been considered Congreve's masterpiece. It deviates not only from comedies of the period but also from comedic drama in general, giving some critics reason to deem the play's intricate plots and counterplots difficult to follow. Scholar Edmund Gosse emphasizes the fact that the plot is one of inaction, remarking that the audience "wishes that the actors and actresses would be doing something. In no play of Congreve's is the...human interest in movement and surprise so utterly neglected." Every revival of The Way of the World is met by theater reviewers who declare its plot incomprehensible, but they also praise the subtlety and sophistication of its dialogue. Even Gosse concedes, "The Way of the World is the bestwritten, the most dazzling, the most intellectually accomplished of all English comedies, perhaps of all the comedies of the world."

The Way of the World depends on the conventional devices of misunderstanding and deception to impart Congreve's cynical view of love, relationships, and the institution of marriage, common themes in Restoration comedy. Still, the drama embraces the ideas of human principles and real love. Like the earlier Love for Love, The Way of the World demonstrates, according to Dobrée, "Congreve's insistence that the precious thing in life—affection in human relations—must be preserved at all costs." As a comedy of manners, The Way of the World has the purpose of exposing social behaviors—passion and foolishness—during Congreve's time to public scrutiny and laughter. Because of its success in doing so, The

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Congreve is renowned for his skill in producing witty and intricate conversations between characters. In fact, so essential is brilliant dialogue in his work that Congreve thought of a scene as a unit of dialogue affected by the arrival or departure of a character. Other works recognized for clever dialogue include:

Amphitryo (186 BCE), a play by Plautus. The comedies of the Roman playwright are characterized by bright, amusing dialogue and humorous, boisterous incidents. A Fine and Private Place (1960), fantasy fiction by Peter S. Beagle. Retelling fables in contemporary settings, Beagle

Beagle. Retelling fables in contemporary settings, Beagle is known for his clever dialogue and sophisticated character development.

Rameu's Nephew and First Satire (1761), satire by Denis Diderot. Through a fictional meeting between two friends in Paris, Diderot exposes the corruption of society during the French Enlightenment with brilliant and witty dialogue.

Way of the World is regarded as the classic example of the comedy of manners.

Responses to Literature

- Though he fathered a daughter, Congreve never married. Assess Congreve's portrayal of the external influences that jeopardize love or marriage. Do you feel that Congreve was fundamentally opposed to marriage? Support your answer with evidence from at least one of his dramas.
- 2. Evaluate the complex plot of *The Way of the World*. Based on what you discover, write a summary of events that occurred before the beginning of the play. Would it have been helpful for Congreve to show these events in the play as well? Why do you think he chose not to?
- 3. Research the political upheaval in England from the civil war in the 1640s that led to the downfall of the English monarchy and to the "restoration" of Charles II in 1660. In what ways did political change help shape Restoration drama? How did political events contribute to the popular appeal of the comedy of manners?
- 4. In *The Way of the World*, Congreve gives his characters unusual names based on actual words. Some examples include Foible, Wilful, and even Mirabell, which is derived from the Latin word *mirabilis*. Make a list of all the unusual character names you can find, offer a definition for each, and state why

- you think Congreve used the name for that particular character.
- 5. How close to reality do you believe the society in *The Way of the World* is in reference to Congreve's time? Does his presentation conform to English society during the Restoration?

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■ Joseph Conrad

BORN: 1857, Berdiczew, Podolia, Russia (now

Poland)

DIED: 1924, Bishopsbourne, Kent, England

NATIONALITY: Polish

GENRE: Novels, short stories

MAIOR WORKS:

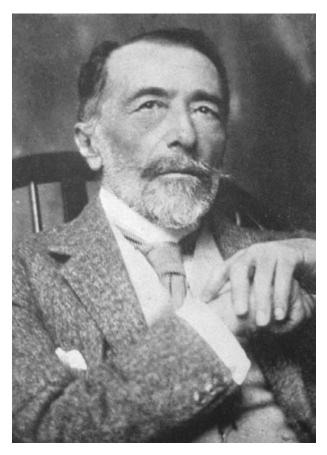
Heart of Darkness (1899)

Lord Jim (1900)

The Secret Sharer (1909)

Overview

Joseph Conrad is widely regarded as one of the foremost prose stylists of English literature—no small achievement for a man who did not learn English until he was twenty. A native of what is now Poland, Conrad was a naturalized British subject famous both for his minutely described adventure tales of life on the sea (he drew on his own maritime experience for these) and his darker examinations of European imperialism in action.



Joseph Conrad Conrad, Joseph, photograph. The Library of Congress.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Life in Exile Conrad's childhood was harsh. His parents were both members of families long identified with the movement for Polish independence from Russia. In 1862 Conrad's father, himself a writer and translator, was exiled to Russia for his revolutionary activities, and his wife and child shared the exile. In 1865 Conrad's mother died, and a year later he was entrusted to the care of his uncle Thaddeus Bobrowski.

In 1868 Conrad attended high school in Lemberg, Galicia; the following year he and his father moved to Cracow, where his father died. In early adolescence the future novelist began to dream of going to sea, and in 1873, while on vacation in western Europe, Conrad saw the sea for the first time. In the autumn of 1874 Conrad went to Marseilles, where he entered the French merchant-marine service. Conrad's experiences at sea would figure prominently in his writing.

A Career on the Sea For the next twenty years Conrad pursued a successful career as a ship's officer. In 1877 he probably took part in the illegal shipment of arms from France to Spain in support of the pretender to the

Spanish throne, Don Carlos. There is evidence that early in 1878 Conrad made an attempt at suicide, most likely because of a failed love affair. In June 1878 Conrad went to England for the first time. He worked as a seaman on English ships, and in 1880 he began his career as an officer in the British merchant service, rising from third mate to master. His voyages took him to Australia, India, Singapore, Java, Borneo, to those distant and exotic places which would provide the background for much of his fiction. In 1886 he was naturalized as a British subject. He received his first command in 1888.

Journey to the Congo In 1890 he made a difficult journey to the Belgian Congo that inspired his great short novel Heart of Darkness. At the time, the Belgian Congo was a corporate "state" privately controlled by King Leopold II of Belgium—in effect, he owned the country. In pursuing personal profits from the natural resources of the Congo, most notably rubber, Leopold ruthlessly exploited the Congo natives, subjecting them to slavery, rape, mutilation, and mass murder. By 1900, an international uproar over the horrors in the Congo was erupting, partly thanks to the publication of Heart of Darkness.

First Writing Efforts In the early 1890s Conrad had begun to think about writing fiction based on his experiences in the East, and in 1893 he discussed his work in progress, the novel Almayer's Folly, with a passenger, the novelist John Galsworthy. (Galsworthy was the first of a number of English and American writers who befriended this middle-aged Polish seaman who had come so late to the profession of letters.) Almayer's Folly was published in 1895, and its favorable critical reception encouraged Conrad to begin a new career as a writer. He married an Englishwoman, Jessie George in 1896, and two years later, just after the birth of Borys, the first of their two sons, they settled in Kent in the south of England, where Conrad lived for the rest of his life.

Financial Struggles Though Conrad had achieved a positive critical reputation by the early 1900s, he lacked financial security. Forever in debt to friends and his agent, James Pinker, he and his family moved to Pent Farm in Kent in 1898, renting a brick cottage from a young writer named Hueffer, later known as Ford Madox Ford. While living in Kent, Conrad and Ford collaborated on two novels, The Inheritors and Romance, and Conrad came into contact with other writers nearby, including Stephen Crane, H.G. Wells, and Henry James, whom Conrad greatly revered. Other literary friends, including John Galsworthy and George Bernard Shaw, loaned him money and helped further his literary career by promoting his works to publishers and critics. The birth of a second son in 1906 made an already strained financial situation even worse. Ford and Conrad fell out over rent Conrad owed, and in 1907 the Conrad family moved to Bedfordshire, and from there in 1909 to Aldington, where they occupied four rooms over a butcher shop.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Conrad's famous contemporaries include:

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939): This Austrian neurologist founded psychoanalysis.

Stephen Crane (1871–1900): Like Conrad, this American writer (author of *The Red Badge of Courage*, 1895) was a master stylist who led an adventurous life.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940): An American novelist, Fitzgerald is best known for his critique of high society in the 1920s, as exemplified in *The Great Gatsby* (1925).

Franz Ferdinand (1863–1914): The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, set in motion a series of events that ultimately led to World War I.

Samuel Clemens (also known as Mark Twain) (1835–1910): This American novelist, like Conrad, received much acclaim for a novel about life on a river.

By 1910, Conrad's debt had grown to be more than \$100,000 in late-twentieth-century values.

All the while, Conrad managed to keep writing. During these difficult years, he turned out some of his finest novels, including *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, and *Under Western Eyes*, as well as his short-story masterpiece, "The Secret Sharer." While the novels leave the sea behind for more political and social issues—a critique of materialism in *Nostromo*, an anarchist bombing in *The Secret Agent*, and the world of a double agent in *Under Western Eyes*—a love of the sea remained in Conrad's blood. It was once again the setting for "The Secret Sharer."

Success and Security With his 1913 novel, Chance, Conrad finally achieved not only celebrity but also financial security. He carried on a lively social life, increasing his circle to include French writer André Gide. Conrad, who had been such a roamer in his youth, traveled little in his later years, though he did visit the United States in late 1922 at the request of his American publisher, Doubleday. Despite claiming he was never a man for awards—Conrad refused knighthood in May 1924—he did harbor a desire for a Nobel Prize. He never received one. On August 3, 1924, Conrad died of a heart attack, leaving unfinished the novel Suspense.

Works in Literary Context

Conrad was, according to Kingsley Widmer in the *Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography*, "a major figure in the transition from Victorian fiction to the more perplexed forms and values of twentieth-century literature...." He was simultaneously one of the last Victorian

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

It is difficult to read Conrad without seeing the influences of the sea on his writing and thinking. Indeed, the isolation an individual faces on a ship and pitting oneself against both nature and others on the ship, has been a common theme in literature, at least as old as Homer's *Odyssey*. Here are some more works that analyze the effects of the sea on humankind:

Moby-Dick (1851), by Herman Melville. This novel retells the story of Captain Ahab, who seeks Moby-Dick, a whale that has destroyed one of Ahab's ships.

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea (1870), by Jules Verne. The mysterious Captain Nemo and his famous vessel the Nautilus take a fantastic journey through the world's oceans in the science-fiction classic.

Kon-Tiki (1950), by Thor Heyerdahl. Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl, intrigued by Polynesian folklore, sets off across the Pacific Ocean in a raft in 1947. This book tells the true story of his adventure.

The Old Man and the Sea (1951), by Ernest Hemingway. In this piece, an aging Cuban fisherman struggles to catch an exceptionally large marlin.

Master and Commander (2003), a film directed by Peter Weir. This film, based on the novels of Patrick O'Brian, recounts the battles between two ships in the South Atlantic and South Pacific Oceans.

writers and one of the first modernist writers. Along with writers like Mark Twain, Conrad was able to incorporate traditional story forms—such as travelogues or journey stories—into novels with a more contemporary sensibility.

Personal Quests Heart of Darkness is not so much about the enigmatic character Kurtz as it is about Marlow and his discovery of good and evil in each individual; his quest is not so much for Kurtz, but for truth within himself. As such, the novella has been compared to Virgil's Aeneid as well as Dante's Inferno and Goethe's Faust.

Reading *Heart of Darkness* as a journey story in which a man comes to understand his own soul will help one understand why the filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola felt the novella would be a good model for his representation of the Vietnam war in *Apocalypse Now*. In Coppola's retelling of *Heart of Darkness*, an American soldier in Vietnam must face great suffering and is forced to understand the devastation wrought by the war of which he is part.

The Distanced Narrator With the invention of his character Marlow, Conrad broke new ground in literary technique, establishing the distancing effect of reported narration, a narrative frame in which the story is told at

one or more removes from the actual action. To achieve this effect, Conrad employs a character within the story who relates the action after the fact. Such a technique helped Conrad avoid what would otherwise be painfully intense subjectivity.

Works in Critical Context

Conrad's work met with immediate success and praise. Not only is his skill noteworthy, but the fact that Conrad wrote in English, which was not his native language, made his use of delicate and original phrasings that much more astounding. As time progressed, however, Conrad picked up his fair share of negative critics, including novelist Chinua Achebe, who felt that Conrad's portrayal of the native Africans in Heart of Darkness is racist. Achebe noted that not one of the natives is portrayed as a fully fleshed out character, thereby, in Achebe's estimation, reducing the characters to a subhuman level. Additionally, Achebe cited Conrad's use of white symbols to represent that which is good and black symbols to represent that which is bad as further evidence for his intrinsic racism. Lord Jim is another of Conrad's books that has been deemed racist because of his associating people of color with the darker forces of chaos. However, many critics contend that Conrad was no more susceptible to racist thought than others of his time and was in fact ahead of his time in calling attention to the ravages caused by colonialism.

Heart of Darkness Contemporary reviewers praised Conrad for his insight and vivid use of language. "The art of Mr. Conrad is exquisite and very subtle," observed a reviewer for the Athenaeum, who went on to note that Heart of Darkness cannot be read carelessly "as evening newspapers and railway novels are perused-with one mental eye closed and the other roving. Mr Conrad himself spares no pains, and from his readers he demands thoughtful attention." A reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement considered the concluding scene of the novella "crisp and brief enough for Flaubert." Conrad's novella quickly entered the canon, eliciting response from critics on both sides of the Atlantic. In an essay originally published in 1917, the American critic H.L. Mencken focused on the character of Kurtz, concluding that he was "at once the most abominable of rogues and the most fantastic of dreamers."

As Lillian Feder noted in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, the novella has "three levels of meaning: on one level it is the story of man's adventures; on another, of his discovery of certain political and social injustices; and on a third, it is a study of his initiation into the mysteries of his own mind." Critics still debate to what degree Marlow finds his evil double in Kurtz and how far, in fact, he identifies with him. Conrad would employ this theme of doubling in later works also, most notably in *Lord Jim* and "The Secret Sharer."

Other critics have remarked about the psychological aspects of the work as well as its tone. The American novelist and critic, Albert J. Guerard, in his Conrad the Novelist, noted not only Conrad's "dramatized psychological intuitions," but also the "impressionist method" and the "random movement of the nightmare," which works on the "controlled level of a poem." Guerard pointed to the contrasting use of dark and light by Conrad as a conscious symbol, and to his vegetative images, which grow to menacing proportions. "Heart of Darkness...remains one of the great dark meditations in literature," Guerard wrote, "and one of the purest expressions of a melancholy temperament." As Frederick R. Karl noted in his A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness is one of the world's greatest novellas: "It asks troublesome questions, disturbs preconceptions, forces curious confrontations, and possibly changes us." Conrad's novella is where, according to Karl, "the nineteenth century becomes the twentieth."

Lord Jim From its earliest reviews, Lord Jim has been considered perhaps Conrad's greatest novel and has been favorably compared to the best that Western literature has to offer. A reviewer in the Spectator noted that Lord Jim was "the most original, remarkable, and engrossing novel of a season by no means unfruitful of excellent fiction," while an Academy critic pronounced that "Lord Jim is a searching study—prosecuted with patience and understanding—of a cowardice of a man who was not a coward." A Bookman contributor acknowledged that the novel "may find various criticism." However, the anonymous reviewer concluded that, "Judged as a document, it must be acknowledged a masterpiece."

Political and social issues aside, Lord Jim is a fascinating case study of a romantic idealist. Some scholars take a more biographical approach to the novel. From this perspective, Jim is a representative of Conrad himself who jumped the Polish ship of state at its most difficult moment to settle in England. The Polish Nobel poet, Czeslaw Milosz, in Atlantic Monthly, pointed out that the name of Jim's ship, Patna, is intended to resonate with the Latin patria or "fatherland." Other, more psychoanalytically minded reviewers note the fact that Lord Jim was published the same year as Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, both books heralding a new century of unconscious forces at work. Still others, including Ira Sadoff in the Dalhousie Review, credit Jim with being a protoexistential hero. "Camus's greatest novel, The Stranger, written forty-two years after Lord Jim, is the epitome of the existential novel," Sadoff noted. "Yet Meursault, the hero of the book, is not so different from Jim." But beyond all these interpretations is the simple fact that the book presents a great yarn. As G.S. Fraser commented in Critical Quarterly, "It is, in fact, part of the interest and range of Conrad that he appeals not only to the sort of reader who enjoys, say George Eliot or Henry James but to the sort who enjoys Robert Louis Stevenson, Rider Haggard, or Conan Doyle."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Chinua Achebe criticized Conrad's portrayal of the native Africans in *Heart of Darkness* as being racist. Read several passages from Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, taking note of the ways Achebe characterizes Africans. Based on your readings of both authors' works, do you think Conrad's novel is, either overtly or subtly, a racist text? Why or why not?
- After reading Heart of Darkness, watch Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now. Compose an interview with Coppola in which he answers a reporter's questions about the conception and making of the movie.
- 3. Read *Lord Jim*. In your opinion, is Jim portrayed as a courageous man? Why or why not?

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Pierre Corneille

BORN: 1606, Rouen, France DIED: 1684, Paris, France NATIONALITY: French

GENRE: Nonfiction, poetry, drama

MAJOR WORKS:

Le Cid (1636–1637)

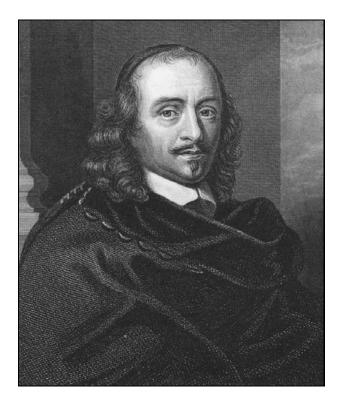
Horace (1640)

Cinna; or, The Mercy of Augustus (1642–1643)

The Martyr Polyeucte (1643)

Overview

Pierre Corneille was the first great tragic dramatist of France. Although many of his thirty-four plays are comedies



Pierre Corneille Corneille, Pierre, illustration. Picture Collection, The Branch Libraries, The New York Public Library.

or works of mixed type, he is particularly known for creating the genre of French classical tragedy with his innovative and controversial masterpiece, *Le Cid.* His work dominated the French stage during the first half of the seventeenth century.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Jesuit Education to Legal Career Corneille was born June 6, 1606, in Rouen, Normandy, France, into a middle-class family. His father worked as an administrator of natural resources for the viscount of Rouen. His education at a Jesuit school, with its emphasis on the Latin classics and on the importance of the role of free will in man's search for a moral life, profoundly affected his later works.

Receiving his law degree in 1624, Corneille acquired two positions in government—one in the administration of natural resources and the other with the maritime court of Rouen, which was a major port and at that time the second biggest city in France and often visited by traveling theater companies. In 1641, he married Marie Lampérière, and the couple would have six children. Throughout his life, Corneille preferred an uncomplicated, suburban family life to the verbal sparring of Paris literary salons. At the time, France was ruled by king Louis XIII, who was guided in his decisions first by his

powerful mother, Marie de Médicis and later by his minister, Cardinal Richelieu. Richelieu worked to enhance the crown's absolute rule at home. As a Catholic, Corneille was more free than his Protestant counterparts, who lost political power through censorship.

Successful Early Plays In this environment, success came fairly early to Corneille as an author of comedies of young love, with plots based largely on misunderstandings and misinformation spread about by jealous rivals. In 1629, he offered his first play, the comedy Melite; ou, Les fausses lettres (Melite; or, The False Letters), to well-known actor Montdory and his theatrical company while they were performing in Rouen. The play was a great success when staged in Paris, launching Corneille's theatrical career.

Over the next several years, Corneille wrote five comedies—including *The Palace Corridor; or, The Rival Friend* (1631) and *Place Royale; or, The Extravagant Lover* (1633–1634)—and the tragedy *Medea* (1634–1635). During this period, he attracted the attention of the powerful and influential Richelieu, who enlisted him as a member of the "Society of Five Authors," a group of acclaimed writers who composed plays under Richelieu's direction. Although Corneille contributed the third act to the joint effort *The Comedy of the Tuileries* (1635), he reportedly became involved in disputes with the cardinal and soon resigned from the group.

Controversy over Le Cid Le Cid (1636–1637) was a great popular success and a sensation at the royal court but gave rise to a heated controversy known as "La Querelle du Cid." The play is based in part on a historical Spanish character—the national hero and military leader who was known for defeating enemies despite overwhelming odds, Rodrigo de Bivar (1040?–1099)—and tells the story of the young lovers Rodrigue and Chimène, whose apparently perfect match is disrupted by their fathers' political rivalry. Le Cid is often called the first great French classical tragedy, and its dramatic power resides in Corneille's skillful manipulation of the conflict of honor and love.

The play's numerous violations of the neoclassical "rules" of tragic design prompted published attacks by Corneille's rivals as well as defenses by Corneille and his supporters. The matter was eventually submitted by Richelieu to the newly formed French Academy, responsible for overseeing French language and literature to ensure absolute control by the crown, which issued a negative judgment of the play. Wounded and discouraged, Corneille ceased writing plays for the next three years.

Success Again with Cinna Corneille's three-year silence ended in May 1640 with the presentation of his second tragedy, Horace, quickly followed by two more tragedies, Cinna; or, The Mercy of Augustus (1641), and (Polyeucte) (1642). Horace continues the theme first

broached in *Le Cid. Cinna*, a political tragedy, and *Polyeucte*, a religious tragedy, were both based on Roman sources and definitively established Corneille's literary reputation.

Cinna has often been argued to be Corneille's finest play after Le Cid, principally because of its strict faithfulness to classical form and the depiction of the slow evolution of Augustus's character from apparent tyrant to magnanimous hero. In contrast with Cinna, Polyeucte incorporates a relatively complex plot with equally complex relationships between pagan and Christian characters of third-century Rome. By this time, there had been a change in leadership in France as both Louis XIII and Richelieu had died in the early 1640s. Child king Louis XIV took power, and his mother, Anne of Austria, acted as regent, guided by Cardinal Mazarin, until 1661, when her son began actively reigning.

Rejected by Playgoing Public In 1647, Corneille moved with his family to Paris and was elected to the French Academy. He continued to write, but soon the public turned against him. Corneille was sufficiently crushed by the chilly reception that he ceased writing for the stage for seven years. As the public turned to younger playwrights such as Molière and Jean Racine, Corneille was not only rejected, but forgotten. As France emerged as the leading power in Europe, he made a last attempt in 1674 with Suréna, a tragedy in which mutual love undermines the hero's political position and leads to his death. After the failure of this play, Corneille accepted that his career as a playwright was over. He died in obscurity on October 1, 1684, at age seventy-eight at his home in Paris.

Works in Literary Context

Though the controversy surrounding *Le Cid* created great stress for Corneille, it resulted in the establishment of a clearer sense of the definition of tragedy and comedy. The debate set the stage for the creation of the mature masterworks of Corneille himself as well as those of Jean Racine and Molière later in the century.

Corneille's Tragedies Most plays in the seventeenth century followed the theatrical "unities" of Aristotle; that is, the story must be coherent and believable, and the action should take place within one day and one city. According to Corneille, great tragedies are those that produce intense emotion in the audience through response to corresponding displays of passion and conflict on the stage. The subjects of such tragedies must always be implausible, yet, the playwright needs to persuade the audience to believe in this implausible subject. Some major character of each tragedy should, in this view, engage in a significant and implausible transgression of ethical norms, particularly those concerning family, friendship, or love. With this view Corneille produces the theoretical foundation for Le Cid.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Corneille's famous contemporaries include:

Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642): French religious leader, politician, and patron of the arts who strengthened the power of the king and established the French Academy.

Louis XIV (1638–1715): King of France, known as the Sun King for his belief that the royal court and all of France should revolve around him like the planets revolve around the sun.

Molière (1622–1673): French dramatist who revolutionized French comedy; well known for his satires, including *The Bourgeois Gentleman* (1670).

Jean Racine (1639–1699): French playwright and rival of Corneille's; well known for his graceful use of the standard French poetic form, the alexandrine, a specific type of twelve-syllable line.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669): Dutch artist, widely regarded as one of the best painters and printmakers in European history; well known for his use of chiaroscuro, or dramatic use of light and dark.

In discussing the one action that was allowed in each tragic plot, Corneille had the new idea of simply counting how many times the hero risked death, and he thus renamed the unity of action the "unity of peril." Once the hero had survived (or failed to survive) one mortal danger, the play should be finished. By this standard, Corneille's *Horace* fails to observe the rule, and the rule in turn is tied to the audience's emotional investment in seeing the hero risk death and escape.

With regard to the one day's time that Aristotle had allotted to tragedy, Corneille, following a contemporary trend, felt that the perfect tragedy should have a story that took as much time to happen as to present on stage. Therefore, if a stage performance, including intermissions, takes roughly two hours, then the play should ideally represent two hours in the lives of the characters. As a practical matter, Corneille recommends being as vague as possible about time passing and allowing the audience to imagine time to suit themselves. He does say, however, that there should be a slight distortion of time in the last couple of acts of the play, since the audience will be caught up in the suspense, and the actions on the stage should be accelerated. Corneille recommends similar vagueness about the single place, usually a room in a palace, where the action of the tragedy takes place.

Works in Critical Context

Corneille's work is noted for its great diversity, brilliant versification, and complexity of plot and situation.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The fundamental tension throughout all of Pierre Corneille's great tragedies is the eternal human struggle to balance personal sentiment with duty to family and society. Here are some other works that deal with this struggle:

Antigone (c. 442 B.C.E.), a play by Sophocles. This drama explores the importance of duty to family versus civic duty. It tells the story of Antigone's fight to bury her brother suitably, against the wishes of her uncle, the king of Thebes.

Frankenstein (1818), a novel by Mary Shelley. This Gothic novel explores ambition versus social responsibility in its tale of a scientist and the semihuman creature he creates.

Like Water for Chocolate (1989), a novel by Laura Esquivel. This novel follows a young Mexican woman, forbidden by her mother to marry, as she struggles to express herself while remaining an obedient daughter. The Remains of the Day (1988), a novel by Kazuo Ishiguro.

The Remains of the Day (1988), a novel by Kazuo Ishiguro. In this novel, an English butler reviews his life and considers what he has sacrificed in the name of duty to his employer and to his country.

Winterset (1935), a play by Maxwell Anderson. This tragedy is based on the true story of two Italian immigrants to the United States who were executed for their radical political beliefs. Moral duty conflicts with romantic love, and the main characters must choose between their responsibilities to their families and their love for each other.

Although the decline in his reputation, which began in his own lifetime, continued throughout the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century saw a reappraisal of his place in literary history. Today, he is situated in the front rank of French dramatists. Corneille's great tragic personages, the grandeur of his style, and his relentless focus on the conflict between passion and moral obligation to society have also established his place in world literature.

His reputation among the larger public continues to rest on the four great tragedies written between 1636 and 1642, but modern scholarship suggests that both his early comedies and late tragedies, taken in context and viewed as a whole, reveal a continuous movement toward experimentation, on both poetic and thematic levels. Such works as the early *The Comic Illusion* (1635) and the late *Suréna* testify to the dramatist's persistent attempts to dazzle his public with innovative responses to old dilemmas. Often going against the grain of established literary conventions of the times, Corneille's genius for invention led him to both great success and total failure with critics, scholars, and audiences alike.

Le Cid

Despite its popular success, the play angered many of the conservative critics of the day. The ensuing stormy "Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns" over literary form lasted for nearly a year, and it was officially resolved at the request of Richelieu by the forty *doctes* (learned men) of the newly formed French Academy. The largely negative judgment of the academy dealt Corneille a severe blow. Although the academy quibbled with some of Corneille's versification and with his laxity in strictly maintaining the classical unities of time, place, and action, the central issue involved a rather academic determination of what was tragic, thus establishing those elements that could be properly included in a tragedy and those that could not.

The classicists, or ancients, of the Academy supported the Aristotelian distinction between *le vrai* (the real) and *le vraisemblance* (the simple appearance of the real, or the verisimilar). History, the *doctes* maintained, is full of true events that conflict with common moral decency and thus are not the proper basis of art. Thus from the *docte* perspective, Chiméne's marriage to her father's killer, though based in fact, was morally reprehensible and consequently an improper use of the real.

Responses to Literature

- 1. How are Corneille's themes of honor, duty, and revenge applicable in today's society? Find examples from his works and present your ideas in small groups.
- 2. Corneille twice stopped writing for several years because of bad reviews, yet now he is considered the founder of French classical tragedy. In groups, discuss how criticism affects an artist. Does criticism motivate people or does it discourage their creativity?
- Read one of Racine's plays. Then compare Racine with Corneille. Which of the two playwrights do you think is better? Support your response with examples from specific works.
- 4. Read *Horace* and create a list of your ten favorite quotes. Share your list with the class and tell why you find the quotes memorable.
- 5. Every period has certain rules to follow for various kinds of art. Using the Internet and your library's resources, research the painter Paul Cézanne. Write an essay analyzing what rules he broke in his art and how his works were viewed, both during his lifetime and today.

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Julio Cortázar

BORN: 1914, Brussels, Belgium DIED: 1984, Paris, France

NATIONALITY: Argentine, French

GENRE: Fiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Bestiario (1951)

Final del juego (1956)

Las armas secretas (1959)

Hopscotch (1963)

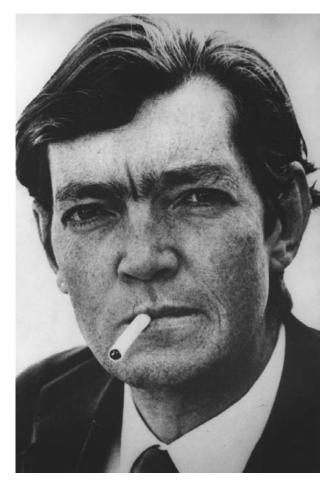
Blow-Up, and Other Stories (1968)

Overview

Spanish literary innovator Julio Cortázar played a key role in the growth of twentieth-century Spanish American literature as one of the seminal figures of the "Boom," a surge of excellence and innovation in Latin American literature during the 1950s and 1960s. Like Gabriel García Márquez and other contemporary Latin American writers, Cortázar combined fantastic and often bizarre plots with commonplace events and characters. Much of his fiction is a reaction against the Western tradition of rationalism and is an attempt to create new ways in which literature can represent life.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Early Writing Career in Buenos Aires Cortázar was born on August 26, 1914, in Brussels, Belgium, to Argentine parents, Julio José Cortázar and his wife, María Herminia Descotte de Cortázar. His parents were on a business trip when they became caught up in World War I, as Belgium was invaded by Germany and occupied during the war. In 1918, after the main fighting of the conflict ended, Cortázar moved with his parents to their native Argentina, where they settled in a suburb of Buenos Aires. An excellent student and voracious reader, Cortázar began writing at a young age, completing a novel by the time he was nine years old.



Julio Cortázar Cortazar, Julio, photograph. AP Images.

After attending school in Buenos Aires, Cortázar was certified in 1935 as a secondary and preparatory school teacher. He then attended the University of Buenos Aires but left after a year to help with the financial situation at home by teaching high school in two towns in the province of Buenos Aires. In 1938, he published Presence, a collection of poems, under the pseudonym Julio Denís. In 1944, he was hired to teach French literature, including surrealism (a movement in the visual arts and literature that produced fantastic images using unnatural juxtapositions and combinations and that was popular between the 1910s and 1940s), at the University of Cuyo. At the time, Argentina was politically as well as militarily unstable and suffered a series of military coups in the 1930s and 1940s. Cortázar was arrested for participating in a demonstration against president-to-be Juan Domingo Perón. Perón was the secretary of labor during the unpopular presidency of General Pedro Pablo Ramirez and had built up his own support through organized labor before being removed from power in October 1945. Perón was to have been elected president of Argentina in February 1946.

After the arrest, Cortázar resigned his position and returned to Buenos Aires, where he became the manager of a publishing association. In 1946 his first short story, "House Taken Over" was published in the journal *Anales de Buenos Aires*, edited by Jorge Luis Borges. At this juncture, Cortázar began his studies in public translating, a field combining languages and law. The combination of work and school was so exhausting that Cortázar suffered from stress-related ailments, including nausea, that would later provide inspiration for some of his classic stories.

Literary Career Continues with Life Abroad In 1949, Cortázar published "The Kings," a dramatic poem based on the classical legend of Theseus, the Athenian king who slew the half-bull, half-human Minotaur. Cortázar reversed the outcome of the story, making the Minotaur the hero. Although "The Kings" was greeted with indifference, Cortázar's first collection of short stories, titled Bestiary, was well received. Nevertheless, Cortázar left Argentina to take advantage of a government scholarship to study in Paris. In 1952, he began work as a translator for UNESCO, the educational agency of the United Nations, a job he continued throughout his life. The following year, he established permanent residency in Paris, becoming a French citizen in 1981 while retaining his Argentine citizenship as well. In 1953, Cortázar married Aurora Bernandez, with whom he later collaborated in the translation of the prose works of Edgar Allan Poe.

End of the Game, Cortázar's second collection of short stories, was published in his early days in France in 1956. It included "Blow-Up" as well as a longer short story, "The Pursuer." In 1960, Cortázar published The Winners, his first novel. The Winners concerned a group of Argentines on a cruise. In the novel, the passengers are denied access to the ship's stern and must decide whether or not to challenge the authorities. He followed *The* Winners with Cronopios and Famas, a collection of miscellaneous fables and flights of fancy. The "Instruction Manual" section of Cronopios and Famas was inspired by a conversation Cortázar had with his wife about a staircase. In "The Instruction Manual" Cortázar describes in precise detail such everyday occurrences as crying, singing, climbing stairs, and combing hair. "Cronopios" and "famas" are two types of people he created for the book, with the cronopios being the playful innovators, while the famas are the respectable traditionalists.

Experiments with Novels Cortázar next published Hopscotch (1963), an experimental novel that included a "Table of Instructions" informing the reader to read the first fifty-six chapters before leapfrogging to chapter 73 and thus "hopskotching" all around. The main character in this elaborate design is Horacio Oliveira, an Argentine expatriate adrift in Paris. Oliveira surrounds himself with a small circle of friends, including his female companion La Maga (The Magician) who, although more intuitive and straightforward than the other members of the

group, is perceived by herself and others as intellectually inferior. After La Maga's son dies unattended while the adults are discussing the meaning of life, Oliveira journeys to Buenos Aires, either to look for La Maga or his own identity, before stopping off at a one-room circus and an insane asylum. Interspersed with this quest for identity is a plot about reconstructing the novel as an art form.

Cortázar conceived 62: A Model Kit (1968) as a sequel to Hopscotch. This experimental work required that readers assemble their own novel. Cortázar found 62: A Model Kit his hardest novel to write because of the rigors of its precise instructions.

Political Coming of Age A Manual for Manuel (1978), Cortázar's next novel, reflected the author's growing political awareness. Cortázar interspersed the narrative of A Manual for Manuel with reprints of news clips, merging story with history, and donated proceeds from the book to two Argentine organizations that aided families of political prisoners. The novel, however, presented an ambivalent view of political protest. The main character, Andres Fava, an Argentine exile in Paris, attends meetings of a group of revolutionaries in exile called the Screwery but is less committed than the others. Finally, as the police close in on the group, Andres finds his cause: compiling a scrapbook of clippings for Manuel, the young son of two Screwery members.

By the time Cortázar wrote this novel, Perón had been removed from power for over two decades in favor of yet another military coup, but watched his country from exile in Spain. While several corrupt administrations followed, and by the early 1970s, Argentina's constitution had been suspended, and acts of terrorism became common. While revolutionaries were common, Cortázar, like Andres, refused to sacrifice his personal and creative freedom to a revolutionary cause. He did not completely ignore political events, however. Although Cortázar supported the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro in the 1950s to remove the corrupt dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, he, like other prominent Latin American intellectuals, signed a letter in 1971 protesting the imprisonment of Cuban poet Heberto Padilla for writing poetry deemed counterrevolutionary. Under Castro, life in Cuba became more repressive, and there was widespread restriction of any protest against the government.

In the 1970s, Cortázar frequently took part in the Thursday demonstrations outside the Argentine Embassy in Paris. These demonstrations were held to protest the Argentine government's involvement in the disappearance of thousands of Argentines, a common occurrence in this period, as many who opposed the government were imprisoned, tortured, and executed by the military. The Nicaraguan revolution of 1979 (which saw the corrupt regime of Anastasio Somoza overthrown by the Sandinista National Liberation Front and a more leftist government take its place) gave Cortázar new hope for a socialism that encouraged, rather than squelched, creative

freedom. He believed that fine literature itself was revolutionary. Some of Cortázar's experiments in form were so revolutionary they defied categorization. Around the Day in Eighty Worlds (1967), Final Round (1969), and A Certain Lucas (1979) were particularly daring collections of miscellaneous short stories, essays, poems, photographs, and vignettes.

Final Book Continuing to be concerned about others, 1983, Cortázar made his final trip to New York to address the United Nations Commission on International Humanitarian Issues. Cortázar wrote what became his last book, Nicaragua, So Violently Sweet (1984), with his companion Carol Dunlop shortly before her death from leukemia in 1982. After Dunlop's death, Cortázar's own health declined. He died on February 12, 1984, of leukemia and heart disease in Paris at the age of sixtynine

Works in Literary Context

Together with fellow writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, and Carlos Fuentes, Cortázar helped bring Latin American literature and politics to international prominence. Author of the short story that inspired Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow-Up* (1966), Cortázar was also well-known for his novel *Hopscotch*. With its elaborate structure, *Hopscotch* evoked comparisons with the works of Marcel Proust and James Joyce.

Influence of the Avant-Garde Cortázar was a constant experimenter and a member of the literary avant-garde. His works probed the connections between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the individual and the state. Although Cortázar advocated socialism and supported the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, he also upheld the need for individual freedom. Strongly influenced by the works of the French surrealists, Cortázar experimented with literary form to challenge the reader's view of everyday reality. He countered conventional adult logic with a childlike sense of wonder, professing a lifelong affinity with J. M. Barrie's character Peter Pan.

Many of Cortázar's short stories are representations of the surreal, metaphysical, horror-filled worlds that prevailed upon his imagination. In these works, he often expressed a conflict between real and unreal events by allowing the fantastic to take control of the mundane in the lives of his characters. Significant in this transformation from the ordinary to the bizarre is the compliant acceptance of extraordinary events by Cortázar's characters. In "Letter to a Young Lady in Paris," for example, the narrator-protagonist, a man staying in the apartment of a friend who is out of town, begins to inexplicably vomit rabbits. Cortázar's own phobias also inspired his work. For example, he had a fear of eating insects hidden in his food, which gave rise to the surreal short story "Circe," a tale about a woman who feeds her suitors cockroaches in the guise of candies.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cortázar's famous contemporaries include:

Fidel Castro (1926–): Castro led the 1959 revolution in Cuba that overthrew the U.S.-backed regime of Batista and installed a Communist government that he would head until his retirement in 2008.

Che Guevara (1928–1967): A Marxist revolutionary and ally of Castro, the Argentine Guevara played a central role in the Cuban revolution and later in guerrilla insurgencies throughout Latin America, until his execution by the Bolivian military.

Jacques Lacan (1901–1981): A French psychologist, Lacan exerted a strong influence over French intellectuals because of his interdisciplinary approach, which combined psychoanalysis, philosophy, linguistics, literary study, and critical theory.

Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997): One of the leading poets of the American Beats, Ginsberg's poem "Howl," was a direct attack on contemporary consumerism, conformity, and complacency.

Salvador Dalí (1904–1989): One of the premier surrealist artists, Dalí also worked in film, photography, and sculpture. His eccentric personality often captured as much attention as his art.

Works in Critical Context

In *Julio Cortázar*, Terry J. Peavler writes, "Julio Cortázar thus sought, as he himself declared, to be a Che Guevara of literature." Cortázar viewed writing as a game of sorts—"a contest with words." Critics believed that his novels and short stories bore the Latin American literary stamp of richness in language and imagery.

The Invading Creature Cortázar's stories are filled with examples of invading creatures such as a tiger that roams through the house of a middle-class family and a dead character who is more alive than the living. Rather than using supernatural forces to fuel readers' fears, Cortázar, according to Jaime Alazraki in The Final Island: The Fiction of Julio Cortázar, used "the fantastic" to expose "overly naive forms of realism."

Hopscotch Hopscotch met with mixed reviews. While the New Republic hailed it as "a spiraling, convulsive, exploding universe of a novel... the most powerful encyclopedia of emotions and visions to emerge from the postwar generation of international writers," the New York Review of Books called it "monumentally boring." Published during an era of student protests in the United States, France, Mexico, and elsewhere, Hopscotch, according to Peavler, "reflects the dissatisfaction of the time,

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Cortázar's writings constituted but one facet of the Latin American literary renaissance of the twentieth century. Here are some other works of that rebirth:

The Magnetic Fields (1920), by André Breton. Written in collaboration with Philippe Soupault, this was one of the founding texts of the Surrealist movement, utilizing a spontaneous "automatic writing" approach. Breton's work would exert a major influence on later Latin American writers.

"The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941), by Jorge Luis Borges. One of Borges's best-known short stories, establishing his international reputation with a philosophical inquiry into the nature of time disguised as a traditional detective mystery.

Love in the Time of Cholera (1985), by Gabriel García Márquez. This novel by the Colombian author explores a love triangle spanning fifty years in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and themes of suffering in the name of love.

Aura (1962), by Carlos Fuentes. Written in second-person narrative, this novel plays with perceptions of past, present, and future, blending the three into an indistinguishable whole.

and the search, no matter how futile, for something better."

Responses to Literature

- 1. Research the government of Argentina during the 1950s as led by Juan Perón. How did it treat artists and writers? From Cortázar's writings, can you conclude what his political opinions may have been?
- 2. What is "magical realism"? Could Cortázar's work fit that label? Explain why or why not. Also, some writers object to the term "magical realism." Why do you think that is?
- 3. As part of a group, read several short stories by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, such as "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941). In discussions, talk about these questions: How does Cortázar compare with Borges, who was considered the master of Latin American fiction when Cortázar began writing? Do the compatriots have similar interests, and do they explore similar themes? How are they different? What was the relationship of the two writers?
- 4. Research some of the French theorists that were influential during the 1950s, such as Jacques Lacan

- and Claude Lévi-Strauss. How would you describe their theories? What do they say about art, metaphysics, and time? Discuss what Cortázar's stories say about psychology, philosophy, language, and time. How are these themes influenced by French critical theory from the 1950s?
- 5. Cortázar was writing around the same time as the American Beat writers such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. Read some Beat poems or prose such as Kerouac's *On the Road*. What do the Beats have in common with Cortázar? How are they different? Consider the authors' philosophies, influences, approaches to music and other forms of culture, as well as styles and themes in order to construct your answer. Create a presentation for the class of your findings.

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William Cowper

BORN: 1731, Great Berkhamsted,

Hertfordshire, England

DIED: 1800, Norfolk, England

NATIONALITY: English

GENRE: Poetry, nonfiction

MAJOR WORKS:

Olney Hymns (with John Newton, 1779)

Poems (1782)

The Task (1785)

The History of John Gilpin (1785)

The Life, and Posthumous Writings, of William Cowper, Esqr. (edited by William Hayley, 1803–1804)

Overview

William Cowper was one of the most popular English poets of the eighteenth century and is considered one of the forerunners of Romanticism. His comic ballad "The Journey of John Gilpin" established his literary reputation; his *Olney Hymns* were incorporated into Evangelical



William Cowper Cowper, William, engraving. The Library of Congress.

liturgy; and his satires enjoyed widespread popularity. Contemporary critics especially value his correspondence, ranking him among the English language's finest letter writers. A frail personality hounded by severe depression, he expressed complex psychological currents in his verse.

Works in Biographical and Historical Context

Lifelong Melancholia Cowper was born on November 15, 1731, in Berkhamsted, England, where his father, John Cowper, was the rector of St. Peter's Church. His background was aristocratic. His father's ancestors held prominent public positions in government and law. His mother, Ann Donne Cowper, was a descendant of the Elizabethan poet John Donne. Her death from childbirth complications in 1737 was the first source of William Cowper's lifelong melancholia, or bouts of depression. The second source came the following year, at Dr. Pitman's School in Markyate, where Cowper was mercilessly bullied by older boys. At age eight, he developed an eye ailment and was sent to live for two years in the home of an oculist.

"Delia" Cowper recuperated and became a successful student at the Westminster School, following which he was sent to learn the legal profession with a London

solicitor named Chapman. While working at Chapman's office, Cowper frequented the home of his uncle, Ashley Cowper, and three female cousins. By the summer of 1752, he was infatuated with his cousin Theadora. They courted for several years, but her father forbade them to marry. Heartbroken, he penned a sequence of love poems to "Delia"; they were released in 1825 as part of Cowper's second posthumous poetry collection.

Although the law did not enthrall him, he was called to the bar in 1754 and served later as Commissioner of Bankruptcy Courts. The young barrister enjoyed the fashionable London life, dining every Thursday with several school friends who called themselves the Nonsense Club. Two of these chums edited a publication called the *Connoisseur*, to which Cowper began contributing satirical pieces.

This life disintegrated in 1763. Ashley Cowper secured for his nephew a lucrative parliamentary clerkship and even promised Theadora's hand once he obtained the post. However, Cowper had to face a public examination before the House of Lords, and this prospect unnerved him completely. Before the fateful day, he attempted suicide. He ended up at the Collegium Insanorum in St. Albans, where he gradually recovered and experienced a religious epiphany that led him to Evangelicalism.

Retreat to the Countryside When he left the hospital in 1765, he lived in Huntingdon as a boarder at the family home of an Evangelical minister, the Reverend Morley Unwin. He was drawn to the maternal figure of Mary Unwin, the minister's wife. After the sudden death of Rev. Unwin in 1767, Cowper and the rest of the household moved to Olney. Cowper enjoyed the peace of this rural town and began to concentrate on writing, starting with an autobiography (that would be published after his death). He came at once under the influence of the Reverend John Newton, an Evangelical and former slave trader. The two men collaborated on the Olney Hymns (1779), of which the most famous is "Amazing Grace," written by Newton. Cowper's lyrics place him in the first rank of English hymnodists; several remain in regular congregational use.

In late 1772, partially in response to local gossip about two unmarried people living together, Cowper and Mrs. Unwin became engaged. Biographers speculate that this betrothal caused him tremendous anxiety, for that winter he succumbed again to mental illness; he was haunted by a dream that God had damned him. The engagement was broken, though the pair continued to live together. Cowper never again attended public worship. He lived for years as an invalid; his animals, his garden, and his poetry were his mainstays against depression.

In 1780 a relative of Cowper's, the Reverend Martin Madan, published a curious treatise named *Thelyphthora*, an argument for polygamy as a social alternative to

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEMPORARIES

Cowper's famous contemporaries include:

Adam Smith (1723–1790): Scottish philosopher and economist; author of *The Wealth of Nations*.

John Newton (1725–1807): Anglican clergyman; coauthor of *Olney Hymns* and author of "Amazing Grace."

Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774): Anglo-Irish poet, novelist, and playwright.

Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802): English scientist, philosopher, and poet; grandfather of Charles Darwin.

Joseph Priestley (1733–1804): British philosopher, theologian, scientist, and author; credited as the discoverer of oxygen.

George III (1738–1820): King of Great Britain (and subsequently the United Kingdom) from 1760 until his death.

prostitution. At John Newton's urging, Cowper responded with *Anti-Thelyphthora* (1781), a long poem deftly combining satire with religious fervor. The same combination infused Cowper's *Poems* (1782), which became known as the "Moral Satires." These didactic verses were praised for their vigor, spontaneity, and hard-hitting enunciation of Evangelical doctrine.

The Task Cowper's next volume, The Task (1785), won him universal critical esteem. This five-thousand-line poem, written in a relaxed blank verse, is considered his masterpiece. A broad investigation of man, nature, and society, it is also the first extended autobiographical poem in English. The scope of its satiric and patriotic interests, alongside its explorations of rural and domestic life, make The Task a truly national poem. The public aspects of the poem, however, are interwoven with distinctly personal ones. Cowper extols the skill of the gardener, who represents harmony with nature, and the imagination of the poet, who provides access to beauty and wisdom. Finding joy and peace in the presence of nature, Cowper proclaims, is the touchstone of spiritual wholeness.

The Task made Cowper's a household name for the next few decades. Augmenting his fame, in the same volume, was "The Journey of John Gilpin," a narrative ballad ostensibly about the adventures of a tailor, but in reality a raucous parody of poetic conventions. The poem was spectacularly successful, and its appeal as an artifact of popular culture lasted for generations. Beneath the farce, though, lie bleak undertones consistent with Cowper's previous work.

The success of *The Task* largely vanquished Cowper's need to write confessional poetry, but it unleashed his ambition. From 1785 to 1790, he sought literary immor-

tality by working on a blank-verse translation of Homer's epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He hoped to surpass Alexander Pope, whose famous versions of Homer had made him the most commercially successful poet in English history. Published in 1791, his translation was a mixed success. He followed up by working on translations of Italian and Latin poems by John Milton.

Cowper's Letters William Cowper's letters are widely admired, especially those he wrote to William Unwin, Mary's son, and his cousin Harriot Hesketh, Theadora's sister. The private audience of these cultivated friends released the sparkling wit, disarming candor, and astute observations that make his correspondence a unique literary phenomenon.

Cowper suffered several more breakdowns in his later years. The lengthy illness and death of his longtime companion Mary Unwin in 1795 sent him into despondency. He was unable to blot out the voice of God's condemnation. He died in 1800.

Works in Literary Context

William Cowper's prose and poetry both display an elegant, convivial style. He absorbed a range of literary influences, perhaps beginning with two books he acquired as a child: the light verse of John Gay's Fables, and the Calvinist Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan. Cowper's satirical writings are in the tradition of Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, and Richard Steele. His religious verse follows after George Herbert and his ancestor John Donne. He admired John Milton above all poets, and The Task shares some characteristics with Milton's epic Paradise Lost.

Fear and Fervor Cowper's mental illness, and constant fear of God's wrath, influenced the thematic content of his writing, from his *Memoir* to his religious poetry. His *Olney Hymns* describe inward states of conflict, insecurity, and agony in a hostile universe occasionally relieved by a glimmer of hope for salvation. Even light, satirical pieces such as "The Journey of John Gilpin" are touched with melancholy and a sense of man's inexorable loneliness. Lord David Cecil named his biography of Cowper after a telling image from *The Task*: "The Stricken Deer." It is a suitable summation of Cowper's poetic stance.

Contemplating Nature Cowper's poetry is distinguished in its fresh appreciation and precise observation of wilderness and the countryside. In *The Task*, his interest in nature unites with his religious concerns. The poem argues that the depth of one's response to nature represents, more or less directly, a person's spiritual worth. For Cowper, the natural world is to be contemplated from an aesthetic point of view, as one would peruse a work of art, albeit one created by an "artificer divine." Cowper delights in the position of observer, rather than participant, in

the world; his poetry reflects his preference for life viewed from a window.

Bequests to the Romantics This spiritual and philosophical reverence for nature became a central tenet of the Romantic movement in British poetry, starting with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth. It was not the only legacy Cowper left to the Romantics. Coleridge praised The Task for its originality in uniting "natural thoughts with natural diction" and "the heart with the head." He was probably referring to Cowper's unprecedented use of blank verse as a vehicle for the flow of consciousness, of Cowper as the progenitor of an "interior" mode in which the poetry is a continual outgrowth of the mind and the emotions. This inwardness, and the poet's emphasis on autobiography and confession, also are what make Cowper an important precursor of Romanticism in England.

Works in Critical Context

William Cowper was the foremost English poet of the generation between Alexander Pope and William Wordsworth. For several decades, he had probably the largest readership of any English poet. From 1782, when his first major volume appeared, to 1837, the year in which Robert Southey completed the monumental *Life and Works of Cowper*, more than a hundred editions of his poems were published in Britain and almost fifty in America. *The Task* received especially favorable notices for its depth of feeling, fluency, and descriptive realism.

Cowper's position as a transitional figure between the neoclassical and Romantic periods in English literature has inspired critical interest in his life and works. Many scholars, including the nineteenth-century critics Walter Bagehot and George Saintsbury, argue that Cowper's satiric and didactic tendencies place him closer to the eighteenth-century moralists than to the Romantics. Others surmise that his use of blank verse, his interest in nature and everyday life, and the emotional core of his poetry link him to Romantics like Wordsworth and Robert Burns.

Of Cowper's poetry, *The Task* has inspired the most critical commentary; however, the majority of recent critical interest in Cowper has centered on his *Memoir* and his correspondence. Discussions of the *Memoir* have largely explored the construction of Cowper's narrative persona. Some scholars have questioned the connections between Cowper's mental illness and certain characteristics of his work. Cowper's letters have won admiration and serious study from numerous scholars. Robert Southey, poet laureate and editor of Cowper's complete works, declared Cowper the best letter writer in the English language.

Responses to Literature

1. Write about the balance between personal and political concerns in *The Task*.

COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE

William Cowper wrote several lyrics for the *Olney Hymns* that are still sung regularly in Evangelical congregations. The Christian hymn is among the most enduring of musical forms, as the following titles demonstrate:

- "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (c. 1527), a hymn by Martin Luther. The best-known hymn by the foremost Protestant leader; sometimes called "The Battle Hymn of the Reformation"
- "Amazing Grace" (1779), a hymn by John Newton. The most famous song of the *Olney Hymns* and one of the most popular of all Christian hymns.
- "Silent Night" (c. 1818), a hymn by Josef Mohr; music by Franz Xaver Gruber. One of the most popular Christmas carols; in the original German, "Stille Nacht."
- "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" (c. 1860), a hymn by Wallace (often spelled "Wallis") Willis. An African American spiritual, often sung at English rugby matches.
- "In the Upper Room" (1947), a hymn by Lucie Campbell. Written by the first woman among the great gospel composers, this song is indelibly associated with the powerful voice of the late gospel singer Mahalia Jackson.
- 2. Many have praised Cowper's mastery of the art of letter writing. Identify some of the most effective techniques Cowper applies in his correspondence. How does he develop his voice in the letters? Does his voice change depending on the recipient of the letter?
- 3. Is it fair to say that Cowper's worldview was anchored in fear? How do you perceive the relationship between fear and Christian faith in Cowper's writing?
- 4. Is it appropriate to link Cowper with the Romantic poets? What is, or is not, Romantic in his outlook and style?
- 5. What do you think accounts for Cowper's considerable popularity during his lifetime?

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